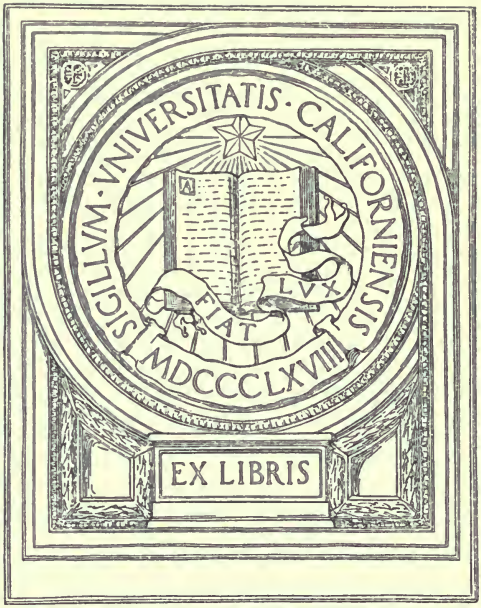
NAYA

Elizabeth Egleston-Hinman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NAYA

"Dougal", in kilts, cap and dirk of the Scottish Highlanders entered to the sound of the bagpipe.

NAYA

A Story of the Bighorn Country

BY

ELIZABETH EGLESTON-HINMAN

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

F. DE FOREST SCHOOK

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To F—

in memory of childhood days
when we, on Pigeon, raced the prairie winds
and had not yet sought The Road

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CHAPTER I

Oh! Snatched away in beauty's bloom,
On thee shall press no ponderous tomb;
But on thy turf shall roses rear their leaves, the earliest of the year,
And the wild cypress wave in tender gloom.

BYRON—*Hebrew Melody.*

Long ago, when the Indians of the North still knelt in credulous and silent awe before the flashing fires of the "Northern Lights," seeing therein the dancing spirits of their slain warriors, a white man, young and courageous, came to live in their country of phantom mountains and sweeping prairies.

He was only a boy, in fact scarcely twenty summers crowned his years, but a restless albeit gentle spirit had ever swept him into adventures and enterprises which set him apart as something startling in the little English village where he dwelt.

After the thunderbolt of his determined departure into that vast abysm of scalping savages and manifold dangers, America, the dismayed family returned to their traditional occupations, —the father to dream among his books in the dingy old library, the older brother merely to wonder anew at the rashness of the younger, while the patient, loving mother plucked the Canterbury bells and gold of Ophir roses in the silent old garden, as she had done from time immemorial.

Far over the sea William Dunsmuir led a life quite different from the one he had left. Gradually working his way to the northwest, he became associated with one of the great fur companies which in the late 50's pursued an extensive trade in that remote and beautiful region. Somewhat later the rapid development of the mining industry also greatly absorbed him, and with these two interests he roamed the trackless forest and followed the great rivers in the free breathing independence that was the chief characteristic of his nature. Occasionally he took the fascinating voyage down the Missouri to the thriving city of St. Louis, and never forgot to

dispatch a part of his abundant revenue to those he had left in far-away England.

The life was perilous, for it was the land of the resentful Blackfoot, who, perceiving the rivers and plains fast diminishing in his chief sustenance, turned a defensive hand against every invasion of the white man. Often had Dunsmuir been robbed, often had he escaped with his life alone, but finally, through a singular happening, he came to their fireside and was honored with the pipe of peace and friendship.

On the outskirts of the vast region which the Blackfeet held in supreme and successful defiance of all other Indian tribes lived their bitter enemies, the Crows, with whom they constantly waged ferocious war. In a chance encounter of two hunting parties the Blackfeet were pushed to extremities and, in the confusion of a pell-mell retreat, being pursued the while by their triumphant victors, they did not notice that the beloved young warrior Wun-nes-tou,[1] the son of their most powerful chief, was not among them. Wild and mournful were the lamentations which echoed among the cliffs when their loss was discovered.

[1] The White Buffalo.

After a brief council in the Painted Wigwam of the agonized but stoic father, Peetohpeekiss,[2] orders were given that a runner make swiftly through the village, commanding the braves to attend their chief in the recovery, whether dead or alive, of the young and royal Wun-nes-tou.

Over the timbered ridges carpeted with needles of pine, down through the rocky glades with their silvery streams of tumbling water, swept the infuriated savages, gorgeous in war paint and splendid trappings. After many hours they entered a tiny valley which the enchanted brush of Spring had painted in undulating folds of green, arabesqued with myriads of bright wild flowers. Just opposite, at the edge of the interrupted forest, appeared a solitary horse bearing an inert bronze figure, devoid both of tomahawk and shield, and whose once superb crest of eagle feathers now drooped broken and formless. By his side walked William Dunsmuir, putting out an occasional steadying hand or giving an encouraging word to the wounded but valiant Indian boy, who, on seeing the advancing band of the Blackfoot warriors, headed by his magnificent father, straightened himself proudly, and

[2] The Eagle Ribs.

laying one hand on the shoulder of his white friend and savior, lifted the other in silent salutation.

Peetohpeekiss rode straight to his side and, without attempting to conceal his joy, took his son in his arms and kissed the smooth brown cheek with the soft, noiseless caress of the Indian.

The characteristically brief explanations revealed that an arrow wound had unhorsed the boy in a patch of chaparral, where he had managed to conceal himself until the last faint whoop of the pursuing enemy had floated to him over the hills. Then, realizing the certainty of their return, he endeavored to escape, and had painfully crept to a spring a half mile down the cañon, where the kind white brother found him. The kind brother examined the wounded shoulder. He put his own mouth to the tear, thus extracting the poison. He hid him in the brush and gave him food. Being revived, he had asked to return to the Painted Wigwam of his father, where a council might ponder a suitable reward. The kind white brother had given his horse and assistance.

The throng of attentive warriors nodded and

grunted their approval, while the stately chief touched William's hand, a custom he had once observed at the Fur Company's station, and said, "The white brother must come."

William, being greatly pleased to gain the friendship of his old enemies, mounted his horse and, riding by the side of Peetohpeekiss, headed the swarthy army toward its distant village, while the rescued boy lay on a stretcher of buffalo skins and saplings, carried by four of his devoted brothers.

After three days of games and feasting and general rejoicing, the dignified council called their new friend to the Painted Wigwam and asked that he choose a gift, either of ponies or robes or weapons of the chase. His request both angered and amazed them.

It seems, the break of morning succeeding his arrival among them found him exploring the banks of the mountain lake, whose many facile advantages had drawn the encampment to its shores. Leaving the yet quiet village far behind, he threaded the jagged boulders and dark pines which banded with somber green this portion of the placid waters. Just beyond a tangle of wild

currant whose masses of yellow bloom filled the air with bracing sweetness, he stood gazing with delight at the streamers of brilliant crimson with which the rising sun was glorifying the world.

He did not notice an Indian girl close by, who, with arms full of the pale flowers, was stepping into the canoe of birch she had secured by a slender thong of deer skin to an overhanging alder. She, equally unconscious, dropped to her knees and, while releasing the moored craft, began singing the exquisite music characteristic of her race. At the first note William turned in breathless wonder, and could neither move nor speak, for the scene, so rich in simple poetic beauty, moved him as no other he had ever viewed. His intense gaze drew the maiden's eyes, whose startled expression was immediately followed by one of shy friendliness. Paddling close to the rock on which he stood, she looked up from the flower-laden canoe in which she knelt, her black braids vivid against the yellow, and said earnestly, "I am Eehniskim.[1] My brother it was whom thou didst save. I thank thee."

He could not answer, so great was his inner

[1] The Crystal Stone.

agitation, but he caught her look and held it until the dark lashes swept downward. Then turning, she paddled swiftly across the lake which lay like a shimmering delicate-hued primrose in its fringe of green. That was all. His constant watchfulness had not given him another glimpse of her.

So, when the chief put his question to William, he received the clearly spoken answer, "I wish to wed your daughter Eehniskim." The general consternation was finally overcome by the young man's decisive and eloquent allusion to the service he had rendered the Blackfoot nation in restoring its hereditary chief, and to the promise of the honorable Peetohpeekiss to accord anything he might ask as reward. The chief reluctantly commanded that the maiden be brought before the council.

After many minutes of deathlike silence a shadow fell athwart the Painted Wigwam, and all eyes turned to The Crystal Stone, who stood awaiting her father's pleasure. Her purple-black hair, interbraided with strips of otter, hung heavy and lustrous about the slim shoulders, almost reaching the edge of the soft tunic of

A shadow fell athwart the Painted Wigwam, and all eyes turned toward Crystal Stone.

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doeskin which fell in straight folds to the little moccasined feet. Its splendid embroidery of richly dyed quills and feathers was edged with snowy ermine, and around her neck was a string of iridescent shells, scintillating fiery lights of blue and green.

Ignoring the gaze of the stranger who stood near by, she slowly advanced to the side of Peetohpeekiss and listened with quiet, attentive eyes until the end. Then turning away with cold dignity she said, "Let the white man speak."

Despite the presence of the stolid council, William caught her hand and, seeing the tears in her eyes, knew that he had won.

After the marriage according to Blackfoot traditions, he journeyed with his bride to the nearest white settlement, where, in the tiny chapel of hewn logs, they knelt to their great love's final sacrament. Then in joy and reverence they stole to the loving, brooding wing of the forest and to their bridal chorus, chanted by the voices of many waters.

After several years a dreamy, rapturous springtime brought them a new blessing. They were living on the shores of a great river of the

North. William was forced to absent himself for a day, leaving Crystal Stone to the happy tasks that filled her simple existence. Not being able to return by nightfall, as he had expected, the first gray of dawn found him anxiously urging his pony through the clouds of mist that drifted in the hollows. As he was about to enter the wigwam, from the crest of which floated a threadlike spiral of smoke, his footsteps were welcomed by a joyous laugh, and, entering, he found Crystal Stone seated on a pile of skins by the fire, her face charged with an eloquent tenderness. Falling to his knees beside her, he received in his arms a solid little bundle, the giving being accompanied by a radiant smile and the words, "Our daughter, Ca-cha-tose Naya-tohta!"[1]

"Oh, what a little name for such a big girl," said the new father, smothering one of his great boyish laughs.

Crystal Stone lifted a happy face in explanation.

"Last night was she put in these arms. The stars trembled gold on the black river. She is

[1] Stars-on-the-River.

Ca-cha-tose Nayatohta, but, if you will, Naya for each day's calling."

Thus came Naya to the world.

Some years afterward the great herds of cattle were driven from the south to the vast plains of Wyoming, and Dunsmuir, perceiving an excellent opportunity to further his fortunes, bought out a big outfit which had recently been trailed from Texas, and established the great Circle-Arrow Ranch on the Powder River. Every year after the spring round-up, he took his little family into the heart of the Bighorn Mountains, which loomed massive and irregular against the western sky.

Once, when for the tenth time the snowy syringa showered its petals in Naya's lovely child face, when the streams with wild merriment sparkled and splashed through the sunny glades, when the wild currant bent its yellow plumes to the mystic pools of the forest, the Angel of Sorrow arrested her flight and cast the shadow of her great dark wings over the land. While gathering willows, Eehniskim made an unfortunate step, which, caving the bank, soaked and loosened

by the spring rains, caused her to fall to the stony creek bed below.

All night in bewildered anguish her husband sat holding the cold little form. The silence was unbroken save for the pines overhead, as they mourned together, or for the steady breathing of the child, who lay at his knee exhausted by her weeping over the great, incomprehensible tragedy. Thus he remained until the ragged peaks far above flashed with the savage splendors of a new day's sun. Awakening Naya, he carried the silent one up out of the gloom, past the drifts of syringa, pale and ghostlike in the cañon's gray light; up beyond the echo of the waterfall's morning song; on and up until the timber lay behind and nothing remained but the soaring pinnacles of granite, stretching snowy arms to the dazzling heavens. They came to a miniature plateau which spread before them like a flower-enameled mosaic, suffused with sunshine, and there he gently laid his precious burden. Many times he retraced his steps, bringing great armfuls of spring's fairyland from the slopes and cañons below.

Then they left her to her eternal sleep.

Every year at the time of flowers they returned, and every night and every morning Naya turned her face toward the distant sentinels, praying to the Great Spirit that the sorrow which lay at their feet might eventually be lifted.

CHAPTER II

Wandering ever in the dance of her own sweet radiance.
GEORGE MACDONALD—*The Wonder.*

On she sped in her great wreath of cloud shadow, through tawny buffalo grass and gorgeous cacti bloom, their golden beauty left far behind to dream luxuriously on the sun-steeped plain; on with flying feet and flying braids, past gently billowing tumbleweeds and white prickly poppies, tremulous and drooping in the heat; on—on up the little slope to the bed of wild sweet peas, darkling and bending in the wind, where breath suddenly failed, and a laughing, gasping heap of brown fell headlong into the mass of purple flowers. A gay, impotent little hand caught at the passing shadow, but it floated on black and silent as a raven's wing and left her to the dazzle of the sunshine.

Finally breath returned and, as she opened her eyes, her whole being dreamed away from the mood which had challenged the mad race of

a few moments before. The sun, that flaming monarch of the prairie, was again holding court behind a wandering cloud, dappling the grassy sea with dark moving shadows, while up beyond all the broken splendor of heaven's arch seemed to recede in a deeper, more majestic blue. As familiar as the scene was to the child, she drew a long breath, partly of unconscious sympathy with its loveliness, partly of the infinite loneliness one feels when granted even a fleeting perception of the true and the beautiful.

Then drawing herself to her knees she threw back the long thick braids, and began gathering the clusters of fragrant flowers. As the nosegay grew, she caught sight of a loco plant and recalled the words of one of the ranch hands whom she had overheard the night before while balancing herself on the high sod wall that surrounded the corral.

"That there bald faced Sally's gone clean mad. It'll take mor'n a broncho buster to ride 'er now. Bill says she 's et some of that nasty loco weed and that she 's plumb clean locoed."

Naya reflected. "Locoed!" It sounded a little terrifying but supremely fascinating, and it

would never do to let Sally monopolize all the new and therefore delightful experiences. She selected the tip of a dusty leaf and placed it gingerly on her tongue. As she was wrinkling her nose in disgust over the bitter taste, she heard a dull onrushing sound that brought her quickly to her feet. There across the slightly rolling hills came a band of young horses, frivolously tossing their heads and kicking up their heels as if quite oblivious of the ultimate sober duties of plough and range that awaited them. Naya fearlessly stood her ground, waving her boquet joyously and calling in an eager voice, "Pigeon! Pigeon!" No voice could have carried above the roar of pounding hoofs, but as the flying band passed just below her, a little blue roan pinto caught sight of the familiar brown figure and hesitated, halted, finally began to climb the slope, followed by her reluctant child, a tiny long limbed sorrel, which obediently followed his mother, in spite of a turning of head and a plaintive whinny after the merry, now fast receding throng of play fellows.

"Oh! Pidgy, Pidgy," the little girl lovingly cooed, tangling her hands in the heavy mane and

rubbing her nose against the silky neck like an overjoyed pony delivered from solitary confinement, "Why are you run away so often? It is forever the night with you and father both gone. Yes, here is another nubbin."

The recipient of these tender nose rubbings and impassioned little whisperings had been standing with drooping head and half closed eyes, her whole attitude a relaxation to the munching of the corn her mistress had provided. This dispatched, cob and all, Pigeon awoke to further possibilities, and began to nose the bulging pocket which to her was a never failing horn of plenty.

"Here, hungry darling," continued the foolish little talk, "One wee bit is left and the lump of sugar for Baby Kickapoo."

He, by the way, had found his mother's temporary tranquillity a more than soul filling compensation for the wrench from his initiatory capers in the social world of Powder River, and was now quite ravished with the idea of sugar for dessert.

"No, no, bad child," said Naya severely, backing a few steps from his youthful importun-

ities. "So bad manners is snatching. Now shake hands." This last was in a coaxing tone so familiar to the colt that he graciously began to paw the air. She caught at the tiny black hoof and, while he gobbled the coveted prize, quietly slipped a short length of rope from the voluminous pocket, and, concealing it, advanced to the unsuspecting mother.

Pigeon had vivid and sometimes agonized memories of a wild, madly joyous life, when, care free and unmolested, she flew over the plains like a bird, making the prairie dogs run chattering to their holes, and the coyotes stand and gaze in sulky silence; when in summer's heat she sought the cool shadows of the cañons and in winter's snow was free to choose a warm, sheltered cliff to protect her from the cruel white hand that had so often slain the reckless and the tardy.

Now those days were gone, and except for occasional bursts of rebellion she had learned to accept philosophically the contemptible sheds and diabolic wire fences. Usually the furious leap of spirit that preceded these outbreaks was quelled by this beseeching voice and caressing

hand, but it was hard to give in to-day. She had meant to linger only long enough to munch her morsels of corn and then pursue the thirsty pilgrimage to the river, lying hidden in the lowlands to the east. Hateful bondage! She gave an impetuous spring, jerking to the ground her valiant captor, who, quite unruffled, as if a tumble was nothing to her, scrambled up, still clinging to the rope, and, deftly slipping a half hitch over Pigeon's nose, landed with a little jump on her now humble captive's back. Off they went at a great rate, plunging straight into the shimmering sea that billowed toward the south in an endless haze of blue, making the jack rabbits and lizards fly in hysterical haste, while the grasshoppers were left to their mad hopping, wondering what kind of a cyclone it was that had frightened them into such violent fits. Light and swift as an antelope fled the gleeful Pigeon, followed by her frolicsome offspring, while Naya, lying prone with her cheek against the out-stretched neck, now and then uttered wierd little Indian cries of encouragement. Finally Pigeon recognized familiar signs which denoted the end of the race,

and, moderating her gait, soon paused in the suburbs of a frequently visited city.

The inhabitants wore neither claw-hammer coats nor hats of the latest dash, nor high heeled slippers, nor abundant store hair—in fact, strange to say, the houses had curtains neither of lace nor of velvet and, if there were any shiny black hansoms hanging about for the public accommodation, they certainly were not to be spied with the naked eye. Instead, the ground was covered with hundreds of little mounds, each one representing, not only the portal of a subterranean dwelling, but also a sort of house top from which the respective owner proclaimed his rights and wrongs in accents cheerful but decisive, while his equally voluble and inattentive neighbors were busy with their own noisy denunciations. Such a barking and scolding as burst from that prairie dog town when it beheld the intruder on the hillock! Naya sat absorbed in one of the many games which her loneliness had suggested to her. "Why, there's a wedding," she thought, as, becoming accustomed to her still presence, the prairie dogs went about their tasks and pastimes. Sure enough, there on their

haunches stood two grave and silent citizens in an attitude unmistakably matrimonial, and from the mound which they faced, harangued the confident preacher, his manner denoting that he alone of all his saintly brethren, knew how to tie a proper knot. And over there, not far away, two policemen, with vociferous rage and disapproval, relentlessly chased an evident outlaw to the very threshold of his refuge, the passageway of which they swiftly blocked with earth, tamping it down with their noses, while the victim within raised his voice in shrill protestation.

Now this was all very well for Naya, but Pigeon was bored beyond endurance, and to pass the time profitably, she dropped her head and began cropping the grass. To the amazement of all concerned, her rider, being taken entirely unawares, made a flying slide down the slanting neck and landed on the ground with a bump, just missing a spiked prickly pear. Naya shrieked with delight, while the astonished populace disappeared from the sight of man. Pigeon, in the philosophy of her years, merely shook her head and ears free of the cumbersome skirts and looked around inquiringly. A growing appetite

tite had influenced her to definite plans, and when the toboggan slider had taken her former seat, down went the head again and down went the hapless rider. This time it was not so funny, for as she struck the ground, she heard a savage bellow and saw approaching what was to her the one terror of the ranch, the old bull Surprise. On he came, making the dirt fly, and shaking his great head as if he meant to pierce the earth with his horns and not only toss the silent city quite over the radiant July sun, but also to hurl the panic-stricken child after it. She sprang to her feet, tugging frantically at the rope in a useless endeavor to make Pigeon lift her head. She abandoned this attempt and tried to get on anyway. Of course the short cluster of mane left to her grasp slipped from trembling fingers and, quite losing her balance, down she went in a tearful heap under the heels of the exasperating pony. The menacing roar came nearer and nearer. To her indescribable relief, this unhappy moment was blessed by the call of a cheery Scotch voice.

"Dinna be cast doon, bairnie. Ye're safe as in yir ain hoose. Tha beastie weel no harm ye."

As the man rode up to her and dismounted, old Surprise continued his stormy course toward the ranch corral and the child, smiling through her rare tears, grasped the arm of the kind-faced Highlander, saying, "I thought to journey to the Milky Way. How I am glad to see you!"

They mounted and hurried on in order to overtake and properly dispose of the steadily gaining mischief-maker. Suddenly Dougal with the air of attentive eagerness which characterizes the teller of good news, said, "Yonder a' tha hoose ye'll be findin' Auld Tom wi' tha mail. Some one is comin' who'll be a wearyin' to see ye; nae doot."

"Father!" exclaimed the child in a voice eloquent of gladness and excitement.

"Ye'll better come awa' hame," continued he teasingly, "and put yir sel' bonnie in yir kirk frock. When tha mune begins tae shine aboot nine, I ken"— breaking off absently and leaning to inspect his cinch.

"To-night?" asked the child, incredulity and joy flooding her face; then, without waiting for a reply, off she flew, giving the amazed Pigeon

such a series of little kicks with her soft moccasined feet that, in dire resentment, the deceitful pony emitted great cavernous groans and stumbled along as if she were the most abused creature in seven kingdoms.

Meanwhile, the deserted Dougal wended his way toward the corral and, gazing after Naya, soliloquized thoughtfully.

"She weel be sittin' on peens for mair than foor oors, an' every meenut an oor. He canna' cum til nine wi'out ower drivin'. Gudeness, how I'm a luvin' yon lassie. She is shure tha licht o' this ranch."

CHAPTER III

The Child-heart is so strange a little thing—
So mild—so timorously shy and small,—
When grown-up hearts throb, it goes scampering
Behind the wall, nor dares peep out at all—
It is the veriest mouse
That hides in any house—
So wild a little thing is any Child-heart.
RILEY—*The Old Home Folks.*

Three years had passed since the death of Crystal Stone. For the first time, William was unable to superintend the spring round-up and moreover, a deprivation of infinitely greater consequence, he and Naya were obliged to forego their annual pilgrimage of love. Early in May, learning of his father's illness, he had gone hastily to England, leaving Naya to the protection of the kind and dependable frontier woman who had cared for the household since their great loss. She was a splendid soul, blest with both refinement and fortitude, the latter trait serving her well during the years of hardship incident to a pioneer's life.

As Naya tore into the house, a whirlwind on pattering moccasins, Hannah sat by a window mending an outrageous tear in a dress singularly like the one adorning the newcomer.

"Hannah—quickly—where may be the letter of my father?"

"Where is my father's letter," said Hannah, lifting her strong, worn countenance in a welcoming smile, as she corrected the awkwardly worded phrase.

"In the tree top, honey dear. You usually enter that way and I thought you would have it a little sooner."

The last words might as well have been spoken to a swiftly winging swallow, for almost before she had finished, Naya was through the door, around the corner, and up among the branches of a great silvery cottonwood, where, on the little table, two letters were pinioned from the dancing breezes by a tiny weight of opalescent ore. One, with broken seal, was addressed to "Mr. Dougal Cameron," while the other, which still remained unopened, was addressed to "Miss Naya Dunsmuir, Circle-Arrow Ranch, Buffalo, Wyo.," with a splendid sound-

The child rent the envelope and slowly read the letter.

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ing "via Miles City, Mont.," in one corner. With a rapid flash of gratitude to the young Scotch foreman, whose kind hand had left his letter too, the child rent her envelope and slowly read:

Clifdale. Westmoreland, England.
June 12th, 188—.

Dear Little Daughter:—After carefully reckoning the days, I find that if my letter catches the stage I have in mind, it will arrive at the ranch early in July, while if it is compelled to wait over until the following week, we will arrive arm in arm. My, but father will be glad to see his childie. I have such heaps of things to tell you about grandmother and grandfather (he is much better) and your little cousins, but I will save all for one of our evenings on the river porch. And I am just brimming with secrets. You can't guess what I have for you. Something neither square nor round, nor very high nor very wide, nor very thick nor very thin. This is the way you will look when you see it.

Goodie-bye, as Dougal says. Worlds of love from

FATHER.

Pausing for an instant of mystified reflection and an ecstatic little caper, she turned to Dougal's, which consisted of brief instructions for a team to meet him at Buffalo on a certain date. To-day! Rushing in search of Hannah, who was now arranging William's room, Naya learned that the day before Old Tom on horseback had taken his weekly trip to Buffalo for the mail, and on arriving at that bustling stage junction, had been astonished at the sight of her father climbing with the other dust coated passengers from the Miles City Overland. He would not wait for the buckboard to come from the ranch, but after a few hours delay, on account of business, would follow Old Tom with a livery team. So he would arrive to-night!

The narrator of these thrilling events received such a bear hug that she fairly gasped.

"Now," said Naya, her head whirling with rapid and decisive plans, "I will no eat supper until he comes, nor you either, Hannah, nor Dougal. Surely, how nice to have chokecherry rolly-poly and potpie of grouse—father has a so big adoration for rolly-poly and potpie. And there shall be wild roses for his room—may the

wind have left a few—and sunflowers for the sitting room."

"Bless you, child," returned the sympathetic woman, "tell Dougal to get the grouse and I will fix them, and you run to yon bend of the river and gather some cherries."

The Powder River is one of those deep bedded streams which, at near view, is seen to roll its turbid, sluggish waters over countless sand bars and around numerous islands, green with a meshlike growth of quaking aspens and willows and leaning cottonwoods, while surveyed from a height it spreads and tangles itself over the shaded velvet prairies, or through chasms between pine sprinkled bluffs, like a lost strand of silver, richly jeweled with topaz and emerald.

Both for comfort and beauty, the low rambling ranch house of stout hewn logs had been built on its western bank, just south of a great butte, its noble proportions lashed and splashed by the tempest into fantastic outlines and strangely blended hues of ochre and violet. The whole country hereabout was scattered with these time-worn figures, as if the monarch of the Bad Lands, that region of traditional terror, had momen-

tarily softened his heart of stone and sent an army of warning heralds to his southern boundary. For protection from wintery blasts the house hugged close to the butte, and was sheltered and adorned on its three remaining flanks by unusually large and luxuriant cottonwoods, with here and there a little fir or spruce which the wistful suggestion of a now silent voice had caused to be transplanted from the mountains.

The low, heavily beamed ceiling and rough unfinished walls of the interior lent themselves admirably to the wild charm of Naya's decorations. After she and Pigeon had made a raid on the cherry patch there was a trip to the fields for sunflowers, and a trip to the prairie for poppies, and a trip to a cañon for this, and a trip to the river for that, until Dougal said, "Aboot sundoon I'll be a buryin' ye if ye nae stop," while Hannah put in an effectual remonstrance.

When all was finished, the tired but happy child went to her room. This apartment opened from a spacious sitting room and formed part of a south wing which had been added to the main structure a few months after its completion. Owing to its site being some three or four

feet higher than the floor of the adjoining room, in reaching it one mounted a little stairway. The open door revealed a taste both wild and startling. At the far end and reaching almost to the peak of the slanting roof, was a wall of ragged boulders, in the crevices of which trickled and sang the shining threads of falling water, while here and there grew vivid patches of moss and fern, their graceful leaves feathering downward toward the luminous pool at its base. Every morning at daybreak Naya plunged into its refreshing waters, sniffing with delight the wild wood odor of fern and flower that formed its border. The fireplace, likewise of stone, was banked with scarlet buffalo berries, still wreathed in the delicate, snowy lace of the wild cucumber, while on the shelf overhead was an Indian basket of beautiful pattern, massed with the blue-green foliage and white blossoms of the prickly poppy. Surmounting this was a great deer head, its wide, many pointed antlers ladened with half-burned candles. In one corner a miniature wigwam, a gift from Naya's mother's people, reared its head of crossed and intercrossed branches, its sloping sides of deer

skin crudely emblazoned in colored quills with outlines of tomahawks and ponies and warriors in aggressive attitudes, while its border was a heavy fringe of black horsehair. Everywhere there were the heads and gleaming eyes of the first settlers of this vast wilderness, everywhere, walls and floor, soft skins and gorgeous Indian blankets, strings of elk teeth and of snake rattles and of quill-like shells from the far-away Pacific, pieces of petrified wood, wide fans of eagle feathers, and beaded Indian garments and relics, in a mad profusion of color. In the midst of this barbaric display was the latest specimen of the ingenious Dougal's handiwork, a narrow bed of satiny, sweet smelling pine covered with a counterpane of pure white. Over this hung Naya's most precious treasure, a vague pastel sketch of her mother, whose lovely lineaments had been an inspiration to William's latent talent. She was represented with head thrown back among what seemed to be the heavy branches of a pine. Barring the wonderful eyes and smile and the touches of ermine on her tunic, all was shadowy and indistinct.

While Naya dressed, a wee fat porcupine with

quills like pinfeathers rolled about and fondled her feet in a most laughable display of affection, while the velvet-eyed fawn, Sahkee, trotting about on dainty legs, alternately kissed her hands and chewed her braids.

As the time passed she grew more and more restless. The cooling twilight was fast veiling the heated land, but from her window she could still discern two spires shadowing upward toward the sky, their attitude suggesting a portal to the lonely, mystic sea beyond, whence came the occasional shrill cry of a wild fowl or the faint wail of a wandering coyote. Soon the stars began to glitter with that brilliance peculiar to prairie regions, and overhead the Milky Way glimmered like a scarf of luminous white which the night winds had torn from the moon-lady's shoulders.

A strange shyness kept her from the roadside where she meant to listen for her father's return, and when she finally heard his voice in the sitting room she astonished herself by creeping into the little Indian lodge, and curling up on the floor, she wept as if her heart would break.

There he found her, and although the tears

were in his own eyes, he could not help laughing at her dormouse attitude.

"It is not that I have no gladness to see you, father," she sobbed, as he picked her up, kissing her again and again. Then she laughed too, and seizing each other's hands, they danced around the room as if they were in a Punch and Judy show.

In the doorway stood a boy of fourteen or thereabouts, dumbfounded over the scene that met his gaze. On catching sight of him Naya paused abruptly, and turned to her father with a question in her eyes.

"Come in, Arthur," he said heartily. "This is your cousin, dear," turning to his daughter. "He has come to live with us and help me make you mind."

One could scarcely say that she was the facsimile of the caricature, but in her wide-eyed astonishment, she certainly bore it a striking resemblance. Finally her face illumined in a smile and she said slowly, "Then you are the neither thick nor thin nor round nor square."

As this petrifying speech reached the boy's ears, there was a mad rush through the room, fol-

lowed by a splash, and the fawn, with distended nostrils and affrighted eyes, was seen to plunge into the pool with an unfamiliar looking Scotch collie in eager and noisy pursuit. Finding this an untenable refuge, the terrified creature scrambled out, scattering in its wake flowers and ferns and stones; then bounding through an open window, it tore across a narrow bridgeway and disappeared in the tree tops and the night.

This sudden din broke the ice, and the silky penitent stranger having been presented to his new mistress, they all went down the steps and, traversing the sitting room, aglow with sunflowers, entered the dining room beyond, where Hannah and Dougal, hungry, but loyally obedient to commands, awaited their coming.

"Think of my little prairie chicken eating pot-pie and rolly-poly at ten o'clock at night," said William, viewing the steaming dishes and the flowers that adorned the table.

"But I am been—have been," corrected the child, looking at Hannah, "most good the whole time. To-day though, I was pretty baby and bad, two times. Cried! Once when old Surprise got for me and once when you got for me," and

looking up at her father affectionately, she hitched her chair closer to his.

"An' do ye call that all yir badness?" questioned Douglas teasingly.

"Oh, that," she replied, in quick confession, thinking he spoke with hidden intent. "I did swim the river one day and having no time to come home for dinner, I did eat the green wild plums and chokecherries in a cañon. That is all."

"An' a fine sight ye were when I found ye—yir face all streaked wi' chokecherry juice an' yir frock all torn. A nice scare ye gae us."

"Tell your father what you found," said Hannah, who was busy heaping plates and filling cups.

"Oh, yes, father. A so queer thing, of stone like Indian grandmother uses to pound the grasshopper meal in."

"Grasshopper meal!" exclaimed Arthur, startled out of his bashful silence.

"Surely," said the child, her eyes dancing with mischief, for she had heard of the prejudice of the white race. "Once on a lake in the far North I made visits to good Indian grandmother, and

she pounded me a so lovely little cake of grasshoppers and baked it on a hot rock. My, chokecherry rolly-poly is most bad to compare."

Arthur remained speechless for the rest of the meal.

When they returned to the sitting room, they found that the trunks and boxes had already been carried in. William immediately unstrapped the largest and took from it a dozen or more books, which Naya received in open arms, and plumping down on the floor, she began reading the titles aloud.

" 'The Mill on the Floss,' 'Undine,'—that so lovely waterlady story you once told me?—'Paul and Virginia'—why *what* is that?"

"A gift from Grandmother Dunsmuir," the amused father answered, unwrapping a big wax doll from its many coverings of tissue paper.

"Oh—h," going into gales of laughter, "it is as I would look to meet a grizzly bear. My eyes would turn blue and stare and my hair would shrink into yellow mats."

Then remembering that she was being rude, she continued graciously. "But how very nice of English grandmother to think so kindly."

Just then out came a hat of drooping brown straw, its crown encircled with a willowy plume, which William had seen in a Fifth Avenue shop window, and, suddenly recalling that Naya had never worn anything but a little shawl in coldest winter and her own heavy tresses in summer, he decided to attempt a conversion in favor of civilized headgear.

The English boy had scarcely spoken the whole evening, but a steady observation of his surroundings and of Naya in particular, had given him impressions which were rather jolting to the ideas and images gained from a humdrum village existence. He noticed with amazed interest Naya's splendid purple-black braids, which, entwined with chains of scarlet kinnikinic berries, fell to the edge of her skirt, and the necklace of little polished bear claws shining against the deep red of her dress, the girdle of moss agates, the bright beaded moccasins, and most of all, the frank chatter and radiant face. The climax came when, seizing the hat and crushing it on sideways, the plume which should have fallen behind bobbing in her face, she snatched the terrified looking doll and went

spinning around the room with the collie barking joyously at her heels.

"A girl who eats grasshoppers, has a waterfall in her room, and never had a hat!" thought he.

Soon there was a general dispersion to bed, but long after he had gone to his room, Arthur lay reviewing all he had seen and heard, until, full of wonder about the new life he was entering upon, he fell into a deep sleep, and the silence of the prairie night brooded over all.

CHAPTER IV

Like the bright shade of some immortal dream
Which walks, when tempest sleeps, the wave of life's dark stream.
As mine own shadow was this child to me.

SHELLY—*The Revolt of Islam.*

Early the following morning William Dunsmuir sat on the broad river porch gazing into the freshness and fragrance of a newborn day with eyes that were troubled and unseeing. The whole world lifted its dew-sparkling face to a mist of palest gold, and the meadow larks across the river cadenced their morning ecstasy in tones of rapturous beauty. But he saw nothing, heard nothing. He sat relaxed and motionless, and the smooth-shaven face with its blue-gray eyes, so boyish in the light of Naya's candles and of his recovered joy, now fully expressed the hardships and sorrows of his forty-four years.

"Had I but taken her to the Catholic Nunnery at Fort Garry as I was minded to do, all this would have been avoided," ran his thoughts. "They seemed nice little things in their dove-

colored frocks. She would be protected there and I would not be eternally weighted with this agonizing fear. *But I shall keep her with me in spite of all.* Dougal says the school. I knew he had bad news when he called me back to the sitting room last night. God knows I have done all I could for the child, as I did for her mother."

The mother! He winced, lashed by a sudden anguish, for there came a remembrance of that last hour by the firelight, when the faint smile faded and the dusky little face became still—then cold.

"Oh, the hours of loneliness, the days of loneliness, the years of loneliness! Dear God, I would die if it were not for the child. So it is happiness to love? Foolish dream of youth. Again that black sea of bitter suffering that rolls and rolls, its deep tragic voice never ceasing. I *feel* it roll. I *see* its blackness. It is the Sea of Eternal Suffering and Forever Lost, and when the sun is on the hills and the sound of cheerful voices is in my ear, then its terrifying waters mount—mount, and that despairing voice cries (surely they can hear it)—'Alone! Alone!

Alone!' Leave me the child or my life will be too hard to bear. Ah."

The expression of pain died from his face and he shifted position as Naya appeared on the slopes below, which, scattered here and there with aspen and cottonwood, descended in natural terraces to the river. She wore a white plume in her hair, and in the white cotton dress of Hannah's make (the good soul was always trying to wean her from barbaric finery) she was quite devoid of color except for the scarlet moccasins and a necklace of delicately tinted coral which old Spain had probably left as a peace offering in the shadow of an Arizona pueblo.

"Heaven keep this little one, half fawn, half meadow lark, with the dawn of a spring morning lighting the dreams in her eyes," thought he, as she ran up the hill, followed by the proud-gaited Sahkee and the new collie, her magic having evidently effected a reconciliation.

"Come here, little Stars-on-the-River," he said tenderly, and she made a little bound into his lap, wrapping her braids around and around his neck, while she said gayly,

"Such a so dreadful sleepiness you must have

had. To-day is your birthday," giving a little squeeze, "and I am wrong not to give you a Ziz-z-z-z-z clock." (Imitating an alarm clock.) We did sit on the floor in front of your door a so long time. Did not we?" pulling the ears of the fawn that was thrusting his nose in her face, in an endeavor to attract attention. "The so white dress and plume are because for your birthday and the so beautiful corals too. And this," drawing from her pocket a little tobacco pouch of buckskin, gay with beads and fringe. "It is I who made tight each little bead and I who am again so happy," and she nestled her cheek against his rough coat. "What queer roughness of your clothes."

"It is Scotch tweed. I bought them in London," replied her father, until now a silent and loving listener to her soft-voiced chatter.

"Tweed! Funny little name. How appropriate (stumbling over the big word) for stranger dog from over the Great Waters. Come, Tweedie," she called to the collie, which, with trembling interest, watched a flock of blackbirds skimming the river. "Listen to the

so nice name I give you. Where is new cousin?" turning again to William.

"He has gone to the stables with Dougal. I waited here to speak to you, for Hannah said you would soon return. I have something important to talk about."

"Oh, father, not scold, I hope," she exclaimed, sitting up hastily in dire consternation. "I am no lose temper since two moons."

"No, darling, it is something quite different." Just then Arthur and Dougal came around the house, the former's fresh boy face turned in excited interest to Dougal, who was evidently expounding the merits and demerits of a horse.

"Mayhap he'll be a wee bit dour wi a stranger ridin' him for the first time, but he has gude sense an' is shure a tidy beastie."

When the boy spied Naya he became instantly shy and, taking off his hat with a muffled "Good morning," dropped to a seat on the steps, while William, addressing Dougal, said,

"Tell Hannah to wait breakfast a few minutes and then come back, for we might as well tell her now."

Arthur rose to enter the house, but his uncle stopped him.

"Stay, Arthur, it is for you too."

"You know, dear," looking at the wondering child and speaking in the quiet, direct way so characteristic of him, "after your mother died we did not tell her people, not only because they were so far, but also because I knew they would want to take her away to the far North. They now live on a great hunting ground given them by the Government, and are supposed to stay there; but a few weeks ago, hearing of our loss, which is theirs too, I appreciate that, they sent a messenger to me. They learned of my absence from Dougal, and they told him that if I do not reveal where your mother is hidden, so they may take her to the Saskatchewan, there to rest with her ancestors, they will steal you and keep you always."

Naya's dark eyes grew wide with horror.

"No! No! The Great Spirit will help. At the sun's rising and always when the great darkness falls I pray to him from my window. Between the leaves I can see the mountains where she waits for me. They shall never know," she

said passionately, "I tell not. I die before. You think if they steal me I am killed?"

"No, dear, they would not harm you, for they love you, of course."

"But you think I live with them? Yes, they are my people and I love the wigwam best—one moves to places always more lovely, and I so adore the dark, still forest, and Uncle White Buffalo does paint his face so beautiful. But I love you more than everythings and everybodys, and I never leave you before we die."

"Precious child, they shall not have you and we will keep our secret, but I ought to send you away to school."

"To school—the place of many children where they ring the bells? Oh, father, I know I speak so terrible your English, but I will try more hard. And you do teach me lots your own self, to read, and to say not naughty worded things, and to control my angry and to call the birds and the flowers with their names, and I can make pretty bead things and tame the little wild things and ride standing up Pigeon when she runs." And she put her head inside the rough tweed jacket and sobbed uncontrollably.

"Uncle William," said the boy, who stood by, pale and resolute, "let us keep Naya here. We will protect her, we three," and he looked at Dougal, who gazed at the distant bluffs with moist eyes. "We will always be with her—one of us, and if anyone approaches we will run for the ranch. I will learn to shoot too," he added with fierce determination.

William clasped his hand in sympathy, but sadly replied, "No, that is it, there must be no blood shed for, after all, they are allied to me by very dear ties. Nor can I bear to set the troops on them. But I thought I must tell you so you could help us guard her. Well, anyway, they will act according to their idea of honor and will make no attempt until they have given me a chance to do what they ask. Do you still think. Dougal, that we ought to send her away?"

"I' dinna ken tha natur of the Indian, boot I gie ye ma word, I liked nae weel their glowerin' countenance an' dour speech. They wud ha rent me frae end to end for a wee drappie o' speerits, I ken. Aboot wha ye're askin,' tha lassie is safe if she'll no run awa' like tha day I was a tellin' ye. It was soon after I met them in yon glen, an'

I thought they wud nae wait yir comin', but ha' ta'en her. She maun keep tae hame. Hoot on tha shule, bairnie. Dinna greet. Ye'll be a breakin' oor herts if ye nae stop."

Suddenly she astonished them all by starting upright, fawn eyes aflash and little fists clenched tight with excitement.

"My, how so fast Pigeon would run. She can jump a buffalo wallow most wide from here to bunk house," she said, laughing at her exaggeration, "and she falls never in the badger hole —just once—then how terrible my fault, for I played the city game, circrush you call it?—and the fringes of the headsash did dance in her eyes and she could not see."

"You are right to take a cheerful view of it, little Naya," said her father, rising and shaking himself. "They may even change their minds and not return at all, so you need not train Pigeon to leap the river just yet. Hurrah for ham and flapjacks," he concluded, assuming an air of gayety that he was far from feeling, and leading the way toward the dining room.

As they entered they were greeted with a series of sharp barks from the newly chris-

tened Tweed. In an attitude of mingled agitation and delight, he viewed the placid fawn that occupied the center of the dining table and contentedly rifled the sugar bowl, her delicate little nose quite lost in its porcelain depths. Naya spatted her hands gleefully, at which sign of dismissal, her well disciplined child stepped carefully to the chair, thence to the floor, avoiding the butter and the syrup jug with most dainty deliberation.

"Sweet baby, to no crash things," said her young mistress, kissing the sticky nose. Whereat Sahkee coolly trotted off to the kitchen for more sugar.

After breakfast Naya caught up a little basket and called to the others.

"It is to-day that I free my butterflies, for their wings droop with sadness and, father, you must see my so cunning racoons that Old Tom did catch for me five sleeps ago."

She danced along, leading the way toward the group of buildings which constituted the remainder of the home ranch settlement. On one arm, swinging by a thong of deer skin, was the basket of fresh grasses and twigs and various other

provisions, while under the other the little fat porcupine snuggled blissfully. Had the disdained doll seen this substitute for her waxen charms, doubtless she would have stared at the ceiling in still glassier, wider eyed resentment. No doubt her plump pink cheeks would have been quite melted with scalding tears of humiliation and homesickness for her place of honor in the respectable English shop far over the sea.

Arthur, only too ready to see everything—anything of this strange and fascinating place, followed close by, while the older members of her retinue decided that the serious issues of accounts and reports could wait another fifteen minutes. The boy had already seen the bunk house for the cowboys, a long, low structure resembling the barracks of a frontier post, and had even caught a glimpse of the shiny pigtail coils which crowned His Majesty, the Chinese cook, while the arrangement of the stables and the checkerboard of corrals were all his own for evermore; but the mysteries of the little sod building in the shadow of the cottonwoods close by had not yet been penetrated.

"It is a place to make moccasins—what you

say them?—shoes for the horses. Dougal did give me one corner for the little wild things."

The door was wide open, and Arthur saw a blacksmith's forge and a long wooden work bench, with a multitudinous array of carpenter's tools. Everywhere, in more or less confusion, was the usual ranch debris of old whippletrees, gunny sacks, bits of harness, mowing machine knives and smashed saddles. In one corner were several woven wire cages containing Naya's family of "little wild things." The bright black eyes of two little racoons seemed to spy her first, and they immediately began to wail like babies; but when she slipped in a few bits of meat, they hushed their cries and in the most comical Biddy Finnegan manner, began to souse and scrub them in a pan of water as if they were part of the Monday's wash. Their next door neighbors were three tiny pocket mice, all of which scuttled like lightning into Naya's outstretched palm, nibbling with frantic haste the dried sunflower seeds she proffered and, with most commendable foresight, cramming the little outside pouches of their cheeks until they looked as if they would burst.

"Darling mamma tail of cotton," said Naya, kneeling before the third cage and throwing in fresh grasses and willow bark to a timorous fluffy cottontail and her two wee babies, which with expressions of deepest concentration and earnestness, ceaselessly moved their tiny triangular mouths.

"I ken, I looked like them when I neared tha kirkyard on ma way to Sabbath shule an' was tryin' not to forget the catechism," said Dougal, as they went into the open.

"Gobble, gobble," came fiercely from around the corner, and there appeared a slatternly, forlorn old veteran, who would have resembled a dismantled market on the night before Christmas had it not been for a majesty of mien before which all scornful thoughts shriveled like thistles in a frost. In his wake twinkled a half dozen balls of peeping yellow down, and when their protector encountered the spectators he glared defiantly, as much as to say, "Laugh at me if you like, but beware. I can peck out eyes as well as bite tenpenny nails."

"It is Rag-tag Moses," said Naya, "I named him for the so kind old man who cared for the

garden last year. He loves and is a father for the chickies, as a so horrid coyote got for their mother. He not angry. He only afraid we make fun. See, he know to dance." Whereat she began to hum a plaintive little melody, its monotonous tones rising and falling in diminished thirds, and, keeping her eyes on her venerable pupil, fell to dancing in a slow, well accented rhythm. The ancient gobbler looked uncertain for a moment, then, proudly lifting his withered old crest still higher and spreading his dilapidated wings and tail, he actually began jigging from side to side in perfect time to the music. The audience almost died laughing at the clumsy old idiot, his expression now being one of graveyard solemnity; whereat their entertainer suddenly made off in high dudgeon, followed by the flutter of his adopted children.

"Now, the butterflies. They are homesick for their sunshine mother," said Naya. Dangling from a low, wide spreading branch was an enormous closely woven wire cage, the door of which was quickly opened. Instantly a great flight of butterflies, gleaming purple and gold in the sun, flashed about the child in airy splendor, some

lighting on her outstretched arms and radiant face, others balancing their painted wings in her white plumed hair, while eddies of brilliant gossamer alternately melted in the dazzle of the morning sky or fluttered down again in a bewildering shower. The Butterfly Siren stood in this shimmering rainbow quite unconscious of the exquisite fantasy of her appearance, and began calling the bits of color by name.

"Red-Rain—tiny beautiful, fly to the fairies. They have nothing to ride," as a white-winged creature flecked with crimson lit on her cheek.

"Oh, there you are, Dreamy Dusky-Wing," recognizing the soft-toned grays and lilacs of another little friend. And to a lovely blue and silver, basking languidly on her hand, "Silver Spot, did you drop from the brush of the Great Spirit when he did paint the sky? Fly to your homes. How, how?"[1] and off she ran through the trees, while the bright patches of old rose, and tawny orange, and vivid green, and lustrous red scattered and floated out toward the flower-embroidered plains, there to dip their gilded wings in the dew and perfume until the coming of the gray days.

[1] Good-by, good-by.

" 'Bedouins of the pathless air'," softly quoted William, watching them out of sight. "It is so strange," turning to Arthur, "she has the most magical way of catching and taming these wild creatures. After playing with them a bit she lets them free, and nine times out of ten they hang around the ranch and come to her as fearlessly as if she were one of them. The house is simply over-run with owls and horned toads and magpies, but I can not scold her, for she has never had any other playmates.

"She is shure a leetle witch. I ha seen her wi' her arms fu' o' flowers go into that butterfly cage an' sit there by the oor, an' tha leetle critturs a crawlin' an' a flyin' all over her. Why tha ither mornin'—gudeness. It's Boockskin Joe on tha mad filly."

From the corral swept a perfect hurricane of dust, in the middle of which one dimly perceived a heaving, plunging mass, the radiating point of flying legs and tail and lariat ends, and the steady sweep of a rawhide quirt. A wide sombrero was seen madly touring the high heavens, and a pipe ripped the air as if dispatched by wireless telegraphy.

"Stay with 'er, Joe"—"Lick the daylights out o' the little devil"—"Much obliged for your pipe"—came the cries from his comrades, who were busily preparing for their own cyclonic flights.

Thwack! Thwack! responded the lashing quirt, and the rider sat his pitching, squealing broncho with as much apparent comfort and ease as if reclining in a wing chair on a porch of tranquil old Virginia.

"Jiminy crickets!" ejaculated Arthur, as the blazing-eyed little monster tore past him, taking great lunges in the air and coming down with legs as stiff as steel rails and bunched together like a deer slaying a rattlesnake.

"She weel shure throw hersel'," prophesied Dougal, and sure enough, the desperate creature took one frightful leap in the air and falling over backwards would have crushed the undaunted Joe had not his marvelous agility landed him beyond the reach of danger. But her freedom was short lived, for no sooner did she struggle to her feet than she found herself once more under the stinging quirt and sharp spur. This time the struggle carried them far, and, bucking and

kicking with every breath, they soon disappeared prairieward in a billow of dust.

"Are ye so daft noo to mount tha black beastie?" asked Dougal of Arthur.

The latter felt as if he had been riddled by chain lightning, so greatly was he shaken by the astounding spectacle.

"My backbone feels a little chilly," he admitted, laughing, "but I am not afraid. If he jumps like that though, there's a toffy can in my box that will be a big enough coffin for all that you find of me."

"Black Alder is friendly enough. He is a bit playful at times, but gentle as Naya's cottontails," assured William. "Dougal and I have a busy day before us, and Naya will show you about the ranch. Don't let her go north into the hills. Ride to the house instantly if you see even one horseman approaching."

The boy was suddenly recaptured by that affliction of afflictions—shyness, for the thought of going off alone with Naya was nothing less than terrifying; but he rallied a little under the sense of responsibility and turned to a lesson in saddle cinching. When he mounted, the shining Alder

looked back questioningly, but, as if feeling his friendly intent allied to the Dunsmuir courage, merely gave a little prance or two. Pigeon and Naya having completed their matinal nose rubbing and general rejoicing, the two children rode side by side toward the sunlit plains.

CHAPTER V

Hark, those two in the hazel coppice—
A boy and a girl, if the good fates please,

. . . . . .

Let them pass, as they will too soon,
With the bean-flowers' boon,
And the blackbird's tune,
And May, and June!

BROWNING—*"De Gustibus."*

"Black Alder has a most lovely shine. He is like the so queer hat that Jack, the Tenderfoot did show me. It was in his trunk when he did come from the East. But I like Pigeon more better. She is the blue clay when the falling leaf time covers it with frost."

Arthur stared into the distance, speechless, floundering in the meshes of an overwhelming confusion.

"If a fellow could only understand what she is driving at," he thought miserably. "She seems perfectly bully, so friendly and unconscious, most as nice as a boy, but you sure need a pony to translate her. Tenderfoot! I have heard of

tender beefsteaks and tender feelings, but tenderfoot is a new one on me, and as for that other nonsense—Pigeon and clay and falling leaves."

Pretty soon Naya tried again.

"I count but thirteen snows. Can you more?"

Silence. She let the question pass and leaned forward to rest her cheek on Pigeon's mane. For several seconds she musingly observed her new playfellow, who, in brand-new sombrero and brand-new tweed tucked into brand-new boots, still sat wrapped in painful silence.

"I hope you find no hurt," she began politely, "but I know a so nice trade and I will show you to ride more better and you will help me to speak the English more better—betterer?" she added in questioning correction.

"Better," he said briefly.

"Oh, to speak the English better better."

"No, plain better."

"How most stupid I am. To speak the English plain better."

At this the boy gulped and heaved with suppressed laughter, and tried to think of his Sunday school teacher's funeral and of the day Phil Hamilton almost put his eye out with a spit ball.

"Oh," she said coldly, "you laugh at me," for the involuntary signs of merriment had not escaped her quick eyes.

"I beg your pardon," he said, his innate courtesy finally loosening his tongue. "I—I thought of a funny story. Once a boy hit me in the eye with a—a piece of paper, so when school was out, I gave him a thumping, and he said he would give me his new knife if I would stop."

"Is it a very bad hurt to have the eye hit with paper?"

"Well," he said blushing, fearful of making an indelicate statement, "you see this had been—chewed and was awful hard."

"Oh! Where may be the new knife he did give you?"

"I didn't take his knife. I just went away and left him."

"What a so queer game thumping must be. Was it in Westmoreland—in Clifdale?"

"Yes. I have lived there all my life."

"Please tell of it, of the house and the garden and of English grandmother."

There came a sudden image of the Westmoreland summer he had just left; the snowy

streamers of cloud floating high over the old gray gabled house in its setting of ancient oak, and craggy fell, and barren moor.

"It is a half mile from Clifdale, you know, and is awful old and weather-beaten—the house, I mean. Mother—we all live there now—wanted to have nice new furniture, but Uncle William and father like the old chairs and curtains and things best. My word, though, but they are faded. Isn't it getting hot?"

"Go on," said Naya, who, despite having heard her father's old home described a hundred times, hung breathless on each word.

"Sometimes the gulls fly in from the sea, and oh—you would like the flowers. In the spring the hills are just yellow with daffodils, and grandmother has a beautiful garden. In the center is the funniest old sun dial, all covered with red roses, and she has two of the rickiest old horses that drag her around the country in a regular Methusaleh of a landau. I guess Uncle William didn't find Clifdale very exciting, so he came to America. There are four of us children, you know, and we all think it is mighty good of him to bring me here and teach me ranching."

Naya delighted in his expansiveness, for in spite of her immaturity and crown of "thirteen snows," she had recognized his paralyzing shyness with secret sympathy, and rejoiced in the result of her friendly approaches. So they rode on and on through the golden day, he describing and glorifying in his rough boy fashion the beautiful little corner of old England, while she chattered quaintly of the mighty ranch and of the fascinations of wigwam life. There were interluding lessons in horsemanship, given in such a diffident way that no boy, however inflated with the importance of fourteen years, could have taken offense.

"The fingers just so, and the left hand always, as the right is for the sometimes so necessary quirt. You sit most straight and splendid," with admiring approval, "I have the so bad habit of leaning to Pigeon's neck to make her run. It is most disgracious."

Then they called upon the inmates of "Happy Town," and there were multitudes of little races to this sagebrush and that bleaching buffalo skull, until midday found them many miles from home.

"No matter," said Naya, "for Hannah did give me some biscuits. The river is near. We will find the shade of the willow."

While they were nibbling their little beaten biscuits, for Hannah was from Kentucky, and washing them down with water from the river, which a heavy winter and an unusually late spring had left swollen and turbulent, Naya suddenly said:

"The heat is most queer, and the wind and the sky. A little tail of the first hot wind, perhaps."

"Oughtn't we to go home now?" asked Arthur, who, although he was having "just the time of his life," felt a little uneasy at this prolonged vagabondage.

"Yes, yes, soon. But first to race the little antelope. It flies as a swallow. Quickly!"

Being to the windward, the unsuspecting creatures had fed to a swell within a hundred yards of the children. Away they all went, the little prong horned "swallows" far in the lead and skimming the hills like gray phantoms.

"It is like crossing a furnace," thought Arthur.

As far as sight could reach, the heat rose from the thick scorched grass in faint dizzy spi-

rals, and the sweeping wind was so hot that Arthur's eyes burned like coals of fire, while overhead the sky became a ghastly shroud of dull copper color; but on they raced, Arthur taking to his new mode of transportation like a seasoned cowboy. Suddenly Naya's muscular little arms jerked Pigeon almost to her haunches.

"Steea," [1] she cried wildly, as the impetuous Black Alder swept past her. Simultaneously with their riders the horses cast one glance into the southwest, now a rushing wall of fire; then they wheeled and tore madly down the wind.

"The river! The river!" called Naya, looking back with blanched face and eyes wide open dread.

Only those who have viewed the sublime but frightful spectacle of a prairie fire can realize its magnificence and its terror. It was like the Sea of Judgment Day, a rocking liquid mass of flame, now obscured by great columns of black smoke, now revealing wild and hideous arms which struck at the heavens as if menacing the very universe with eternal destruction. Nearer and ever nearer it came; its merciless accom-

[1] Fire.

plice, the Wind Demon, madly tossing his hair of flame, and seeming to shriek his triumph with every blast of smoke and cinders. The horses panted with exhaustion, but struggled on, knowing that to slacken meant death.

"How glad to have left Baby Kickapoo!" darted through Naya's mind. A motley herd of antelope and wolves and coyotes, headed by a great antlered deer, swept past them through the thickening smoke, old and bitter enmities being forgotten in the mutual peril.

"Can we make it?" shouted Arthur, who, pale but self controled, was trying to keep close to Naya.

"Neetasta," [1] she said, shivering, although she could feel the breath of the hungry monster close at her back and the sparks fell about them like hot rain. The stampeding herd was already plunging into the water.

"In another minute," thought the heaving Black Alder, his eyes on the cool haven, when a treacherous badger hole caught his foot and he fell violently to the ground, rolling over and over and throwing his rider far over his head. Before

[1] "I think so."

Arthur could catch him he was up and in the river.

"Can you swim?" asked Naya, struggling to stop Pigeon.

"No," he groaned, "but no matter. Go on. Naya, do hurry."

"But you burn or drown," she wailed, noting the tall grass and the depth of the river, and swiftly slipping to the ground, she pulled him toward the horse. "I swim most often."

"I shall not," he said, trying to lift her to the saddle.

"Oh, Arthur," she sobbed, "it right here. We both die. Go! Go!"

Seeing that he imperiled her safety by lingering, he some way managed to scramble on the now plunging and almost unmanageable Pigeon and was soon out of harm's way.

Moaning, "Christecoom![2] Christecoom," the little girl frantically tore off her dress, for she knew that the current would drag her. As she ran in petticoat and underwaist to the water's edge, a flaming brand of dry cottonwood struck one of the slim brown arms, and with a little cry

[2] "The Great Spirit."

of pain she dropped into the water and sank out of sight. When she rose to the surface, a considerable distance from the shore, she noticed that Pigeon was swimming low with a look of distress in her almost human eyes.

"Pull not the rein," she called, "and sit most still or she will roll. Wet your head."

Then down she went again. When she came up the second time they were drifting to an island two thirds of the way across, and were now comparatively safe, although the smoke and sparks still poured over them. Naya sank in mute pain on the edge of the willow-thicketed sand bar.

"Your arm," exclaimed Arthur, dropping to his knees beside her and, in his consternation, letting go the rein. Pigeon gave one swift look at the ravaging enemy which roared up and down the shore like a baffled beast of prey, and seeing the runaway Alder climbing the opposite shore, she took a speedy and unceremonious departure.

"If the island burns, then both are lost," said Naya, watching her sadly, while Arthur felt like beating his head on the sands. "My arm, I can swim not more."

The poor child's hardy little frame suddenly collapsed under its burden of pain, and exhaustion, and terror, and for the first time in her life, she completely lost consciousness. Arthur thought she was dead and fell dumb beside her. When she came to, she found herself lying sheltered from the wind and smoke on a bed of dry, thick grass.

"I thought you were dead and carried you here," he said in a choking voice. "Let me bandage your arm, and then you must put my coat on, for you are shivering. The fire is dying fast and there is no more danger."

"Arthur," she said slowly, watching him tear his handkerchief, "you would stay and be burned for my safeness. I forget not. I love you always next to father and mother and Dougal and Hannah—and Len, perhaps."

"Who's Len?" he asked.

"Well, Len—is Len," was the musing reply.

Arthur inwardly decided that he was pretty far down the line, but he felt the honor of the sixth place, nevertheless, and exclaimed with a burst of boyish enthusiasm,

"Just think what *you* did for me. I tell you,

you are just too bully for anything, and I—I simply adore you." Whereat he blushed crimson to find himself actually speaking that love-making word that he never dreamed could be used outside of print.

"If I could only get closer than number six!" he thought.

The afternoon wore slowly away.

"Oh, to be able to swim!" he groaned, "then I could walk to the ranch and bring back a horse. There's heaps of water in Westmoreland, you know, but mother always made such everlasting babies of us kids, and we couldn't go in above our ankles."

"Father will come," she said, "but I think Pigeon and Alder go not home until the great darkness falls. They suppose us at the far other ranch, perhaps."

The rayless sun, like a blood-red, misshapen monster, sank into the west and, with a livid leer at the blackened land, disappeared into a nether world; while the wind, heaving the ghastly sigh of a tormented soul, followed in its wake. All the world lay shadowed in deepest violet, and overhead the Angel of Evening had

strewn the purple depths as with a handful of lustrous pearls.

"Perhaps we make a fire," suggested Naya, "then father sees, and the wolves come not."

"But I have no matches," he replied mournfully. "Naya, if you will only forgive me, I will learn to swim the Atlantic Ocean, and I hope I may die if I ever stir again without matches."

He wondered at her fortitude, for since her sobbing entreaties on the shore, she had neither complained nor wept.

"I think," she said, as the night deepened around them, "that I put my head in your lap and sleep a little. The arm is most well with the soothing medicine leaves, and I am most tired."

After he had made her as comfortable as possible, she said sweetly, "It is as with mother. I had often my head in her lap, and we talked of the flowers and the birds. She told me so sweet little stories of them. I see her always. She is most lovely—more than the song of the meadow lark in the Moon of Flowers. And her eyes! It is so strange," she continued in a mystical whisper. "I see always a dim far, far country and a great mountain to reach the sky. It has a so

white light streaming up—up. I think it is not fire, but a spirit. That is her eyes. She knew not the books as father, but she so loved the flowers that I have seen her tears fall to the violets and the white columbine, as she knelt to them in the forest."

Finally she slept, and Arthur sat quiet and full of wonder. How different it all was from England! What a strange life, and what strange people!

A far-away cry came over the hills, and he aroused himself abruptly.

"Naya," he said, it is your father, I think!" His loud "Halloo" was answered repeatedly, the sound coming nearer and nearer, and almost before she knew it, Naya was in her father's arms.

"Baby child! Baby child!" he repeated again and again, clasping her as if he would never let her go.

Meanwhile Dougal recounted to Arthur how they had been from home all day in the northern hills, and Hannah, thinking the children had joined them, had experienced no alarm over their absence. The two men rode in at nightfall just as the riderless horses crossed the river, and

their agonized anxiety during their three hours search may well be imagined. They had led two fresh horses with them, and plunging into the dark waters, the party soon emerged upon the blackened and devastated plain. It lay vast and still, its flowered tapestry a thing of yesterday, and under the wan sheen of the newly risen moon, it appeared as the bitter, tragic waters of a Dead Sea. Here and there slunk the gaunt shadows of coyotes that had returned to feed on the charred remains of their less fortunate fellows.

Despite their thankful and relieved hearts, the ride home was dispirited and silent. Naya was so exhausted that William lifted her to his horse and, leaping to a seat behind the high cantle of the old Spanish saddle, held her with one hand and guided with the other.

Fortunately, the great iron gray, Rajah, realized that it was an occasion for magnanimity and decent behavior, and accepted his load with patience.

Their arrival at midnight found them so spent that the waiting Hannah asked few questions, but directing Dougal to the broth and biscuits she had prepared, she undressed the little girl and

laid her in the snowy linen of the little pine bed.

"It is the heaven," said the child softly, kissing the motherly hand that bandaged her arm

After a cup of broth she fell into a deep sleep, but soon awakened, moaning with pain and fever, and Hannah and her father did not surrender her to Dougal's care until she was finally quiet and the morning star glimmered palely through the trees.

CHAPTER VI

They waste us—ay—like April snow
In the warm noon, we shrink away;
And fast they follow, as we go
Toward the setting day—
Till they shall fill the land, and we
Are driven into the Western sea.
BRYANT—*An Indian at the Burial-Place of His Fathers.*

The lovely Summer Lady had vanished with the swallows to idle under sapphire skies in the land of olive and jessamine, but the fragrance of her sweet soul and her flower-strewn robes lingered in the soft October air like dream music in the memory. The cottonwoods and poplars were torches of pure pale gold streaming skyward, and here and there splashes of crimson spoke from the river shore or the dun colored bluffs. Far to the south the bloomless plains, already settling to their winter sleep, drifted to the horizon under a film of faintest lavender.

But in the house of the Circle-Arrow Ranch it was as if Spring danced on the hill tops. Naya was well again.

"I 'll hang my harp on a weeping willow tree-e-e
And may the world go well with thee-e-e,"

joyously screeched the new hired girl in the kitchen, as she banged the dishes in the sink. Hannah bent over a little omelet on the stove.

"In another week you and your 'weeping willow tree' will go back to Wind River," she thought grimly, wincing under the discordant din.

"Lor' ma'm, if it ain't that young spark from pa's ranch."

Whereat, the excited song bird wiped her hands on the roller towel and, rushing to the little mirror by the window, began to pull at her tousle of dusty black hair. With a furtive glance at Hannah, she spat on her eyebrows and pinched her already burstingly red cheeks, in a determination to be beautiful, whatever the means or cost. Hannah waived severity in consideration of the pending banishment, and observed with amusement the frantic preliminaries of the Wind River belle. On her way to the milk house, built over a spring at the foot of the butte, she met the conquering hero. He was a bronze faced youngster of twenty, and wore his cow-

puncher regalia of fringed "shaps," and jingling spurs, and drooping sombrero with the air of one who had been born to them.

"Good morning, Len Douglas," she said cheerily. "If you have brought Naya anything that crawls, I shall drown you in the spring."

"Why, Mrs. Warren," he replied, pulling off his broad-brimmed hat, while his handsome brown face became all smiles and white teeth, "the idear of such cruelty. I got these here pictures from back home yesterday, and I thought maybe she would like 'em, and the leaves is surely harmless enough; they don't crawl nor eat up crocheted shawls." And he held up for inspection a big bunch of scarlet sumac and a folder of photographs which reached its full length with a clatter, revealing yards of Faneuil Hall and Bunker Hill monument lying prone on their brown glossy sides. Hannah was admiring, but hurried on, saying mischievously over her shoulder,

"Don't get lost in the kitchen and forget your way to Naya's room."

This ardent and flirtatious young swain had no intention of slighting the bird-in-hand oppor-

tunity which awaited him, for was not this country of desolation devoid of even birds in the bushes? Were there not a hundred cow-punchers scattered on ranch and range to one girl singing in the kitchen? Even a facile, heavy beauty from Wind River was better than nothing, he decided; but partly to torment, partly because he was really anxious to see the child, the news of whose illness had torn across the country faster than the fire, he deliberately passed the kitchen window and went around to the sitting room door. With a courtesy and fine feeling that contrasted sharply with his reckless reputation, he awaited Hannah's coming, and they mounted the steps together.

The strangely beautiful room was flooded with sunshine, and Naya, in a little wrapper of warm red, sat by the window with an open book on her knee. The porcupine lay torpid on the sill and her inseparable shadows, Sahkee and Tweed, snuggled for the best place on the fur rug close to her feet. The intermittent but ravaging fever of the past three months had lifted the sunbrown from her delicately featured face and left it a dusky cream, with a touch of glowing autumn

leaf under the sweet dark eyes. The glorious hair, which had been miraculously spared, fell over her shoulders and the arm of the great chair, purple-black in the shadow, with glints of bronze where the sun touched it. She was playing with it absently, dipping her hands into the soft depths and lifting the strands until they separated and cobwebbed against the sun. But her thoughts were not of her hair. She looked at the book with eyes full of sadness and wonder.

"What is it?" asked Hannah, preceding Len with the tray.

"Maggie Tulliver," she murmured, "Maggie Tulliver."

"No, sir, the lady is unknown to these parts," said Len, showering her with his offering, "It's the Old South Meetin' House and Powder River shrubbery."

She caught at the flying scarlet leaves and the ziz-zag of old Boston landmarks with an expression of delight, for, despite his belonging to another ranch, she and the young cow-puncher were fast friends. One day he had accidentally come upon her at a spring, trying to plaster with mud a rattlesnake bite on poor Pigeon's swollen

leg, and his efficient aid had won her lasting gratitude and affection.

"How most pretty, Len," she exclaimed, "it was kind to you to come so far. Oh, Hannah, you darling, you knew that I am as a little wolf for hunger and could not wait until the dinner. Oh, the omelet which would fly as a feather to the wind—and milk—and apricot tart. Me likee, me likee," she ended in gleeful imitation of old "High Binder," as the cow-punchers called See Yup, the bunk house cook. Hannah put the tray on a small table at Naya's elbow and left her to Len, whom they all knew and trusted, notwithstanding his wild, half desperado reputation.

"He's a scalawag of the first water," said old Hartwell of Triangle, a week since, when he and William met on the beef round-up. "He's been to Cheyenne on a d—— tear, and he has such a fetchin' way that he dragged half the other boys along. I hear he got into a shootin' match over a girl and put the other feller out of commission for a month of Sundays. But an honester cuss I've never seed, and he's that willin' and that capable that when he come back I just took him

in again as if he'd been to Sunday school a behavin' hisself."

He certainly bore that story no resemblance to-day. His thick brown hair was the climax of all that is smooth and shiny, this really marvelous feat having been accomplished in a remote corner of the bunk house with the aid of a fine tooth comb and the "ship's hairbrush." His blue flannel shirt was spick and span, as was the red silk handkerchief knotted around his neck, and his young hazel eyes wore an expression of almost childlike content, as he deftly made a wreath of the autumn leaves for Naya's hair and talked about the mud flats of Revere.

"They ain't just mud all the time, you know. By and by the tide comes in and then it's like a bay, and when it's dark and them lights is on the point there, I tell you it's just rummy. And the smell! Gosh all fish hooks! Excuse me," he said, reddening to the domain of the shiny hair, "but it *is* awful nice," and his eulogy ended somewhat lamely.

"What is the tide?" questioned Naya, eyeing the growing chaplet as she gulped her milk and

ate her apricot tart with the appetite of convalescing childhood.

"Well, you see the old ocean just tips and spills over like a waterin' trough in a fit. Here's your bonnet."

"No, you arrange it to my head," said Naya, looking up with her deep, lovely gaze.

He let the wreath fall, trying not to touch her hair, he knew not why, and as he turned away he said to himself,

"I guess you've spreed 'bout long enough, Len Douglas, you good for nothing son———. I guess you're hittin the trail for h——as fast as you can go, and it's time you was puttin' on the brakes."

Just then the door opened and William entered.

"Hello, Len," he said, slapping the young cow-puncher on the back. "See Yup wanted me to give you a package for him," turning to Naya, "but I told him to bring it himself. Come in, Yup."

The Chinese cook stood in the doorway, his yellow moon face and almond eyes grinning delight with the world in general and himself in

particular. He had uncoiled his "lariat," as the boys called it, and it now pigtailed almost to his heels in a thin stiff braid. Instead of his usual white apron, he was arrayed in elegant calling costume, consisting of a round black hat, about two sizes too small for him, and a loose-sleeved shirt affair that Naya, in secret embarrassment and sympathy, always felt he had neglected to tuck in.

"Me no plitty Melican plesents. Me sendee San Flisco—blothee little shop. No velly nicee," and he handed the child a package from which fell an exquisite silken fan, its sticks of creamy ivory carved and fretted into a semblance of old lace. On one side was embroidered a little Asiatic garden; a tiny brown pagoda festooned with wisteria, a row of purple iris, and a gorgeous peacock, while a leaning cherry tree showered all with its delicate pink petals.

"Oh!" she breathed in rapture, "one feels the wind to blow the petals. And this!"—and she slipped the little bracelet of jade over her hand.

"How most sweet to you, See Yup, to so remember me. I make a hat band of so pretty beads. May I arrange it to your hat?"

"Muchee thanks, muchee thanks," he kept repeating in ecstasy, as she fastened the bright strip around the crown, "to-day ketchum heap good jelly cake. Clow-punchee like 'em heap. I blingee," and off he went in the little round hat with its incongruous Indian finery, bliss plainly emanating from every feature.

"The generous fellow really thinks he is indebted to you," remarked her father, examining the beautiful and rare embroidery.

"Well, so long," said Len, who, unperceived, had hardly taken his eyes from the gracious little being in the chair, and before they knew it he was gone,

"Yes," his thoughts continued as he took his way through the cottonwoods toward the stable, never once glancing kitchenward, "it's about time you pried open your blinkers and dried up on the whisky question—and a few other things."

"Will ye no be havin' a bite wi' tha fouks a' tha hoose?" questioned Dougal, who now rode into the corral, accompanied by Arthur.

"Nope, got to vamoose. Old Hartwell's been primin his pea shooter; it's a twenty-two. Sweet

baby! I'm goin' to buy it a pink sash and some booties," and off he galloped toward the Triangle Ranch, which lay far the other side of the Bighorns.

"Dire necessity," Hannah's appellation for the Wind River beauty, gazed with chagrin out of the window and saw him disappear in a whirl of dust.

"Blast his bones," she muttered fiercely, "I'll get even, you bet your sweet life."

Hannah overheard and it was the last straw.

"Mr. Dunsmuir," she said, calling him into the sitting room, "I have dismissed Daisy. As you know, under ordinary circumstances, I prefer to care for the house alone, and Naya is almost well now. Dougal said he would drive me to Buffalo this afternoon to do some errands, and I thought it a good chance for her to get started on her homeward journey."

William looked thoughtful a moment, then finally replied, "I have to ride over to Crazy Woman Creek this afternoon, and Naya—but there is Arthur, of course. He will stay with her, and Old Tom is working in the shop to-day. All right, Hannah, but you must let See Yup

help you out. Have him do your cleaning and bread-making. I will speak to him."

As Arthur sat at the dinner table narrating the morning's adventures, his uncle recalled the words of the observant Dougal, spoken a few days after their arrival from England.

"Ken ye tha lines of Oliver Holmes of Massachusetts? 'I'd rather be a bright-haired boy, than reign a gray-beard king.' I'm a thinkin' on 'em each time I look at yon lad. He's shure green as spring grass, but he's got tha grit of a Texas steer and a gude hert. That's tha principal thing, a gude hert. Just because he heard tha leetle wan a callin' after her butterflies in her fever, naethin wud do but he maun roon himsel' most to deith down there among the willows an' milkweed—an' captured nary a one. Why, he asked me yesterday if Pigeon is wha' is called 'clay frost color,' and when I said 'roan' he looked that astonished, and then he wanted to know if 'tenderfoot' is some kind of a disease and if people come to Wyoming to get cured same as for loong tribble," whereat the big Scotchman had roared with laughter. "But," he had added, "he is lernin' to swim like a

feesch, I tell ye, and is a becomin' that skilly wi' tha horses that tha boys are all ta'en to 'im fine."

Arthur had certainly changed since the memorable and disastrous day of the prairie fire. The fair English complexion had given way to ruddy sunburn, and he had grown both in stature and self-assurance. In consideration of his prudent nature and the recent fourteenth birthday, William had presented him with a six-shooter, holster, cartridge belt and all which now formidably topped the Levi-Strauss overalls he had selected from the pile in the storehouse, while his pliable Stetson was garnished with snake rattles, trophies of personal encounters with that sinister inhabitant of the plains.

"Now defenseless and fragile creature," he began in a dirge-like voice when the two children were finally alone in the house, "I'm Jack Slade and you are in my power. See this gun? Beware. I can *almost* hit a target once out of ten times. Do come out," he added in his natural voice, "for it is lovely and warm, and I'll spread this fur thing right in the sun."

"Yes," she assented eagerly, "under the tree of falling leaves. I will take the beads—and

oh, by and by, what fun to make the chocolate to a little twig fire."

After Hannah's departure she had fastened a white plume in her hair and thrown a tangle of kinnikinic berries around her neck. She now ran to a big wooden box with a hinge top, which, covered with an Indian rug, formed a seat before the river windows. Carefully lifting and examining its folded treasures, she finally chose a robe of doeskin, exquisitely lined with the plumage of the white swan and, throwing it over her shoulders, went out into the sunshine. While Arthur shot at the mark, she sat under the spreading cottonwood, working with her bright beads, and pausing now and then to glance upward, as the pale yellow leaves eddied gently downward through the soft quiet air.

"There are Jim Carver and his little sister," announced Arthur presently, as a big clumsy boy of sixteen, followed by a timid blue-eyed child in torn shoes and an immense sunbonnet appeared through the trees.

One day not long before, William had seen an old tilting prairie schooner laboring over the dusty plain, with its usual accompaniment of

fagged horses, dangling pail and woe-be-gone dog. A closer inspection and inquiries brought to light that a shiftless good for nothing squatter had abandoned his wife and hoard of little children to their fates, and they were wandering homeless and starving with nothing to look forward to but winter and death. William had lodged them in an empty log cabin on a near by gulch and was providing for them.

Naya rose and smiled brightly at her guests.

"A disagreeable pig," she thought, as the boy, in a manner both sullen and overbearing, refused her invitation to sit down.

The little girl shyly seated herself on one corner of the fur robe and, removing the ungainly sunbonnet, revealed the most appealing prettiness, despite her rather pinched and frightened air.

"Nine snows—a little as the English doll, but *dear,*" decided her hostess, beginning to chat and show her the beads.

Even Arthur's boy eyes noticed the strange contrast they made. Naya suddenly glowed like some splendid dark-eyed princess, while the

sweet looks of the other became curiously eclipsed and insignificant.

"Come on, Jim, and try my new revolver," said Arthur cordially.

An hour or so passed and they began making the chocolate over a tiny camp fire. Naya went to the house and, not only ferreted out cakes and goodies of various kinds, but also a bundle of clothes for the forlorn looking little visitor, not forgetting to add the new shoes which her father was trying to substitute for the beloved moccasins. "There, you so stiff little demons," and with the most reckless generosity she rolled them savagely in two of her new night dresses.

Jim had been worsted in the shooting match and felt hateful.

"Most cooked," said Naya, peeping in the steaming chocolate pot, "Arthur, more sugar please, I think." And he sped to the house, where See Yup, on a cleaning tour, delayed him for a few minutes.

"Naya is a mighty funny name," observed Jim with repellant familiarity.

"But it is not my real name. My name is

Miss Ca-cha-tose Nayatohta Dunsmuir," she answered coldly, unaware that it sounded somewhat long and incongruous.

The boy roared.

"Mine is Ichabod Bumpsky de Barr," he said.

"You are most rude," replied Naya, rising to her feet and regarding him haughtily.

"Aw rats, what airs. Your mother was a squaw and your father's a common squaw man. Why, you're nuthin' but a half-breed Injun'. Look at the chicken feathers in your"—but he never finished, for Arthur hurrying from the house, heard the insulting words and, letting the sugar bowl fall with a crash, jumped at him like a tiger. His hands clutched the astonished Jim's throat and his knees banged into his stomach with such force that down they went, rolling over and over in the leaves and dirt, while Bessie shrieked and sobbed with fright, and Naya, becoming suddenly faint, dropped limply to the ground. "Arthur," she tried to call, but her voice was weak and powerless.

"You—you puppy, you coward," shouted the young warrior from Clifdale, gripping and

pounding with such energy and speed that his victim's superior size counted for nothing. "Beg her pardon and I'll quit."

"Yes," came the muffled answer, and Arthur let him up.

"I beg pardon," he growled, black with rage and, covered with dust and blood, for his nose was bleeding, he ingloriously retreated whence he came, the sobbing Bessie trotting behind him.

"Bessie, come back. Your things," called Arthur, but the child neither turned nor replied.

"Your face is most scratched, and I have over spilled the chocolate," said Naya, and, looking at each other, they began to laugh.

As it was a long hard drive to Buffalo, Hannah and Dougal were not expected until the following day, and it was over See Yup's supper of rice cakes and dried prunes that William heard of the afternoon's conflict. It was the first time Naya had been subjected to insult on account of her Indian parentage, and his heart was sore within him. They said good night to the beaming Celestial and slowly strolled toward the house on the river.

The hush of evening lay on the land like an invisible mantle of peace. The sun sank gently behind the rich blue masses of the Bighorns, pausing, as in exquisite after-thought, to tenderly touch with lilac and amber and rose the fairy-like wreaths of cloud that hung loosely in the sky, while, like a worn hopeless soul in the presence of a glorifying influence, the earth lay shy and quiet, tremulously reflecting the beauty that hovered over it. There was an odor of dust in the air and far across the hills a lost calf bellowed unceasingly. Countless flocks of migrating birds winged southward against the tinted sky, the music of their voices coming faintly from their remote and trackless pathways. William breathed deeply, deciding he was a foolish old woman with his continual *bête noir,* and, noticing that Naya's eyes were shadowy with fatigue and that it was growing rapidly colder, he persuaded her to go in doors.

After tucking her in the little pine bed and reading aloud for an hour, Arthur having joined them, he, as usual, placed a candle and a glass of water within easy reach and, kissing her

tenderly, left her to Tweed and the silvery splash of the waterfall.

Her mind became a confusion of falling leaves, and the river turned to chocolate and blue beads. Lots of blue ones; Arthur likes them best. See Yup's is red with white stars.

Tweed growled and she started up from that delicious first drowsiness.

"Hush, Tweedie, just a coyote."

He certainly was a horrid boy. Why should he laugh because her mother was an Indian? Beautiful mother, gathering goldenrod up there on the hill. Listen! It is a mourning dove. And the sleepy images began again. Poor Maggie Tulliver. The distant strains of music always floated away and she could hear them no longer. Everything beautiful was just beyond. Arthur was out there now, beating the horrid brother Tom. Served him right.

There was a sudden swish of wind in the trees, and heavy rain drops brushed the panes. She became wide awake once more and cuddled under the covers in her soft cotton flannel nightdress, for it had become much colder. Suddenly she saw Maggie's pale dead face looking at

her from deep waters, and she shuddered with nameless dread, while the storm tortured trees twisted and moaned and the rain began to pour down in sheets.

"I am most foolish. I will read a little as father does, then the sleep will come," said Naya aloud, and she resolutely lit her candle. Throwing a shawl around her shoulders, she reached for a book on the little table at her side. It was "Jane Eyre," and she knew it almost by heart, but, opening at random, she was soon absorbed. It was an unfortunate page.

"But it was not fated that I should sleep that night. A dream had scarcely approached my ear, when it fled affrighted, scared by a marrow freezing incident enough. (Tweedie, hush.) This was a demoniac laugh—low, suppressed and deep—uttered, as it seemed, at the very keyhole of my chamber door. The head of my bed was near the door, and I thought at first the goblin laughter stood at my bed side—or rather crouched by my pillow; but I rose, looked around and could see nothing; while, as I still gazed, the unnatural sound was reiterated; and

I knew it came from behind the panels. . . . Something gurgled and moaned."

As she read these terrifying words, she glanced quickly toward the window and her blood seemed turned to snow. A dark sinister face was pressed against the pane, glowering at her with wild eyes. For one frightful moment the savage vision held her, then, as Tweed sprang between them, she smothered the candle with her book and, in unutterable terror, fled to her father's room.

"Father, father," she cried, throwing herself on him, "they come—the Indians. Oh, do not let them take me. Do not! Do not!"

"Poor child," he answered, rising and fumbling for the matches, you have overdone again, and the miserable fever has returned. My poor, poor baby."

"No! No!" she sobbed, "not make a light. Hear Tweedie! A so dreadful face was to the window. I read with my candle and saw it."

Her manner was so convincing that with a heavy heart, he covered her in his bed and, slipping on his clothes in the dark, went to the sitting room.

A dark, sinister face was pressed against the pane, glowering at her with wild eyes.

He lit the lamp and hesitated, reflecting, before the gun rack.

"If it is they, conciliation is the only method," he decided and, unarmed, went out into the storm.

"Who is there?" he called.

Three Indians came around the house and halted in the path of light that streamed from the open door. Two still sat on their dripping ponies, while the third stalked bareheaded in the storm.

"Enter, sons of Cristecoom," said William in Blackfoot, "it is the big storm of the falling leaf time. Dost thou hunt the *ouacasee?*" [1]

They grunted a curt negative and held a low voiced consultation; then, tying their ponies to the fir saplings of the porch, they followed William in silence. A vestige of fire flickered in the great stone fireplace and while he heaped on the wood, William wondered if they knew he was alone with two children and that the bunk house was way beyond the grove of cottonwoods.

"Big storm," he repeated cheerfully, "I will call a man to prepare food and beds. It is long,

[1] Deer.

Mix-ke-mote-skin-na,[1] since we hunted the *ponokah*[2] by the Lake of the Dying Face. I greet my red brothers with joy."

"Innuya, ne see chippe cogue ahtose,"[3] briefly assented the one addressed, ignoring the last part of the cordial speech.

They were powerful warriors with eyes like eagles. Despite the rain beaten forlornness of his feathered headdress and buckskin fringe, Iron Horn, apparently the oldest and the leader of the party, stood in the leaping firelight, a superb representative of a passing race. The two young bucks remained a little to the rear, silent and erect, wrapped closely in their dripping blankets of green and scarlet, their coarse black hair, which glittered with rain drops, hanging lank and wet about their swarthy faces.

"Be seated. I would smoke with my brothers from the North," and William reached for the pipestone calumet that hung over the fireplace.

"We neither sit nor smoke in the *moeese*[4] of an enemy," said Iron Horn with cold dignity.

[1] The Iron Horn.

[2] Elk.

[3] "It is long, fifty moons."

[4] Wigwam.

"Enemy? I understand not. We are brothers since the day I saved Wun-nes-tou from the scalping knives of the Crows," and William sought to revive the gratitude which dwells abundantly in the heart of the Indian.

But Iron Horn was unmoved.

"The *napiquan*[5] always remembers if he does right. He ever forgets if he does wrong," and his eyes flashed with scorn. "The Indian thinks not more if he does a kindness but he thinks always to revenge a wrong. Thou didst save Wun-nes-tou. It was right. The mighty Pee-tohpeekiss refused not the reward thou didst ask. It is long ago. It is settled. Thou art a *napiquan*. The *napiquan* is a robber. He takes our lands, kills our *eneuh*[6] and our *kekstakee*.[7]

Cristecoom gave us hunting grounds. The land of the Great-River-That-Runs-Swiftly,[8] the head waters of the Great Muddy,[9] the Backbone-of-the-World[10]—they were ours. The Crows, the

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[5] White man.
[6] Buffalo.
[7] Beaver.
[8] The Saskatchewan River.
[9] The Missouri River.
[10] The Rocky Mountains.

Assiniboins, the Dakotahs, the Crees, they were as squaws and children in our hands. Now all is changed. The *napiquan* kills our *eneuh*. We starve. They give us a little land. It is bare. The *eneuh* are gone. They give us food, so much a day as to dogs. Our young men rot with *nah heeoh kee* [11] and indolence. Our nation is broken as the back of the *ponokah*. Who has done this? The *napiquan*." And he glowered with savage fury.

William hardly listened to this burst of fanatic eloquence. He was thinking of Naya and of what he ought to do. Conciliation was hopeless.

After a moment's silence the Indian continued.

"Thou art a *napiquan*. Thou didst take our royal maiden. Fifteen times had the Moon of Flowers touched her hair. It was black. It shone as the wing of the raven. The mighty Peetohpeekiss gave her to thee. When Cristecoom calls her she must lie with her fathers in the land of the Great-River-That-Runs-Swiftly. The mighty Peetohpeekiss has said it."

[11] Whisky.

He has crossed the Great River. Wun-nes-tou is chief. We are his messengers. Eehniskim was called forty moons ago. Thou didst not tell us. He commands that thou show us her grave. This will carry her sacred bones to the Great-River-That-Runs-Swiftly."

William shuddered as he glanced at the buck-skin bag the Indian drew from under his striped blanket.

"She was a gift of Cristecoom and the mighty Peetohpeekiss. I give her not to the Indian," he replied coldly.

The young bucks drew nearer and there was an ominous silence.

"Then we will take the child, Ca-cha-tose Nayatohta. It is the decree of Wun-nes-tou, son of Peetohpeekiss."

"I keep my child. It is the final word of Tcha-aes-sa-ko-mah-pee [1] to Wun-nes-tou. The red men have far to go. It is well that they lose no time," and opening wide the door, he stood in haughty silence waiting for them to go out.

They were so astonished at his courage and

[1] The Bear's Child.

quick decision, and so momentarily overcome by the force of his personality, that, hardly knowing what they did, they filed past him into the night.

Hastily bolting the heavy slab door, William seized his six-shooter and, extinguishing the light, hurried to his room.

"Naya," he said softly, but there was no answer. Then he felt his way to the bed and put out his hand, but it was empty. "Good God, were there more?" he thought. Just then a blur of white appeared in the doorway leading to her room.

"I did hear," she whispered. "I did peek by the door in my room. You—you scared them," and she gave a little hysterical giggle. "Will they shoot by the windows?"

"No, no, darling, let father cover you. There, it is all right. Father is here."

Her teeth were chattering with cold and nervousness.

"Come you not also to bed?"

"I am not sleepy. Just close little eyes and don't talk. Hold fast to my hand and the sand man will come. It is all right."

He sat staring into the darkness, every sense alert and ready. The wind swept about the house, stripping the helpless cottonwoods in merciless fury and making such a various din that William clutched his six-shooter in rigid suspense. Once a milk pan that Naya used for feeding her numerous family, banged against the house, and a young cottonwood, tried beyond its strength, snapped and crashed to the ground, its branches brushing the window at his elbow. From time to time, Naya wakeful and restless, lovingly patted the strong firm hand, and once she whispered with another little giggle. "Red Deer was the most scared. Once on visit to Indian grandmother he did tease me with a so ugly water snake. I like all but snakes and coyotes."

Reassured by her father's presence, for to her he was a god and a giant and an angel all in one, the child fell asleep; but he sat motionless and intent until the clang of the bunk house bell told him that the day was breaking.

CHAPTER VII

Hoards after hoards his rising raptures fill,
Yet still he sighs, for hoards are wanting still.
GOLDSMITH—*The Traveler.*

A week later Old Hartwell sat in his office poring over accounts. It was a little room and stamped with an air of disorder and neglect. Scraps of dry mud were scattered over the uneven board floor, and the scanty cheap furniture struggled pitifully with decrepitude and downfall. As if to avenge abuse, an old sofa emitted its unwholesome looking stuffing in great bulges, leaving a series of defiant ridges to torment the repose of its persecutor. It was loosely covered with worn Brussels carpet, the design of monstrous flaunting roses now scarcely discernible. The battered window shade hung all askew, and a frayed rent in one corner gave it the comical appearance of winking at you confidentially, as if to say, "We're on to 'Old Grab and Hang to It,' ain't we? Won't even have cream for breakfast, and soon he'll be under the sod. Wise old

fool, ain't he? Lots of 'em—ha?" And the jocose curtain chuckled on through the nights and days.

"Old Grab and Hang to It" certainly did not believe in palatial house furnishing nor in table luxuries either, for, as he once responded to a certain timid suggestion of the drudge he called wife, "I tell you, Maria, there ain't no money in havin' milk and cream and butter, and all that trash. Condensed stuff is good enough for this ranch, and mighty little of that too, and as for a new rocker for the settin' room, I could buy a calf for that price. In four years it would weight twelve hundred if an ounce, and if cattle keeps a raisin' I would net—" and he started off muttering his computations, while the woman who had left the snug little farm in Ohio with its peace and primitive plenty for the barren riches of Cattle Land, gazed after him with tired, hopeless eyes. A voice came to her from the woodshed.

"There is a tavern in the town, in the town,
And there my true love sits him down, sits him down."

Her expression became more deeply weary and, in sudden collapse, she sank to an empty

soap box which formed part of the sitting room furniture, and, covering her head with her blue calico apron, wept bitterly.

But Old Hartwell was not thinking of this scene, so momentarily annoying. His face was flushed with excitement and almost savage joy.

"Eight thousand if there's a hoof, and next year I can most double 'em," he thought. "Must hang on to that young Douglas, for he's the best line rider in the outfit. If it's only an open winter," and he spat copiously toward the spittoon, which he invariably missed nine times out of ten. If there was a deity he worshiped above cattle, it was good Star Plug chewing tobacco and lots of it, as was amply testified by the inundated condition of his grizzled beard. There was something absolutely geographical about it, with its wide rivulets and multitudes of thinning tributaries.

"Pa," said Daisy, at the door, "there is a h—— of a racket goin' on in the bunk house, and I'll tell you just what it is. The boys is all drunk as lords, and it's Len Douglas that's done it, for I seen him a cachin' somethin' in the haystack when he come from town yesterday, and

I peeked afterwards, and there was a whole demijohn full."

Hartwell banged on the desk, and his heavy face bloated with fury.

"Haven't I told them I would dismiss the first man that brought whisky on this ranch? Why didn't you tell me? But Len—" he added, his manner quieting somewhat.

"And besides, Pa," she went on hastily, noticing signs of weakening and evading his question with a new stock of information, "he was a sparkin' around me until a month ago, and now he snubs me awful. He asked me to marry him, he did, and now that he is so friendly with them there stuck-up Englishers on Powder River, he won't notice common folks like me."

"Common folks," raged Old Grab and Hang to It, "common folks. I guess we've got a pedigree as well as the next one. Been foolin' around my girl has he, and been givin' her the mitten? I'll see about this, you young scalawag. Been corruptin' my men with whisky, too, has he?" and he made for the bunk house, cursing and threatening at every step.

Daisy slipped behind him, unperceived in

the growing darkness. The desire to get even with Len for his indifference was fast losing its edge, for her father's fearful anger told her that she was somewhat over-reaching her plans. She certainly did not want Len to go away. A system of reasoning, as absurd as it was headlong, had founded the firm conviction that once her father had given him a good rating before his brother cow-punchers, his humiliation would make her so secure in her superiority that the handsome boy would be at her feet. She crept stealthily to a window, while her outraged parent went around to the door.

"Landy!" she gasped, as the riotous scene in the bunk house met her eye.

A dirty kerosene hanging lamp threw a blurred light over the great room with its fifteen or twenty beds banked along the walls, and on the eight or ten disheveled votaries of Bacchus, most of them in their underclothes, who were earnestly engaged in the friendly occupation of shooting at each other's feet and hurling chairs at each other's heads. Len, still dressed and with his wide hat tilted on the back of his head,

sat on a table whanging a banjo in one key while his uproarious baritone delivered in another—

> "The wind blew the nose off her face,
> It started with the wind to run a race,
> Gosh! It hit me when 't was goin' such a pace
> That now I 've got two noses on my face."

As Hartwell put his head in the door, a flying chair knocked his hat off, just grazing his head, and some bubbling mischief-maker tripped him so that he sprawled headlong in their midst.

They were all youngsters from eighteen to twenty-five and were neither vicious looking nor vicious meaning, but a little whisky and their mad frolicking had stimulated their young spirits until they bordered on frenzy.

"Hurrah for Old Grab and Hang to It," shouted one, "let's string him to a rafter," and he seized a rope and began whirling it around his head.

"Silence!" thundered Hartwell, who had pulled himself up and was paying no attention to the bullets pricking the boards about his feet.

At his entrance Len had risen and dropped his banjo, but the general uproar was unabated

and the would-be lyncher swung the lasso with increased velocity. Len suddenly sprang in their midst, his hazel eyes fired with command.

"Shut up!" he bellowed in a voice that would have sent a river running backwards—and all was quiet. Some snickered as if realizing the absurdity of a shooting match in such unconventional costume, others merely looked sullen, while a few seemed grave with realization.

"Better apologize to Mr. Hartwell," said Len, and he turned away indifferently. But he was seized violently by the arm.

"You—you son——" gasped the ranchman, his face livid with rage, "it was you who brought the whisky on to my ranch. You know well enough that it is forbid. What have you to say for yourself?"

Len released his arm without replying. After a few seconds' silence, a boy in bright blue underdrawers and a brushy mop of red hair, stepped forward with the dignity of a diplomat.

"It's like Len to take the blame, but *I* gave the boys the whisky. I didn't bring it to the ranch a purpose, though. This afternoon, about a mile east, I met Buck Redding, who is hunt-

in' cattle for the Sand Creek outfit, and he gave me a little bottle. There wasn't enough to soak one man, let alone eight."

Wiggy and his bosom friend Len exchanged glances of mutual affection and admiration as the latter continued.

"Shucks, Mr. Hartwell, in another half hour we would have been sleepin' like babes. We were just havin' a little fun. You oughtn't to expect full growed men to begin work when the stars is shinin' and then learn a golden text at sundown and go to bed like suckin' doves."

In some cases nothing increases seething wrath like apology and just reasoning. This was one of those cases, and besides there was the other score.

"But you're a low down —— You've been a courtin' my daughter; you asked her to marry you and now you've gone back on her."

An indefinable gleam shot across Len's face, but he answered quietly, "It's a lie."

"You bet it is if he says so," chorused half a dozen voices, and the men crowded around in eager defense; but at a sign from their leader

they fell back and he continued in the same low controlled voice.

"I'll thank you to give me my 'time,' Mr. Hartwell. I leave within half an hour."

There was a murmur of dismay among his brother cow-punchers and all began dressing, while the air was full of subdued mutterings.

"If he goes, I go too." "Wouldn't have worked for the old skin in the first place if he hadn't such good horses." "Best man he's got and he'd better hang onto him."

And Old Grab and Hang to It suddenly proved himself worthy of his title, for even insult, and the luxury of slashing temper, and the necessity of humbling himself before his men, were as nothing compared to his love of gain.

"Well," he said, clearing his throat, "We'll talk it over in the morning, Len. We're both a little overhet, and we'd better sleep on it."

But Len assured him he was not "overhet," and was so determined that the erstwhile volcano walked humbly to the house and wrote Len's check. "Half of the others 'll quit now," and at the thought of the winter storms and the

green men looking after his great herds, Hartwell groaned aloud.

Suddenly a sob came from a room above the office—Daisy's room. Instantly his wrath returned. "The lyin' huzzy. What did she tell them lies for, and what in h—— is she cryin' for?"

The intricate process of feminine circumvention and reasoning is so incomprehensible to the opposite sex in general, that it is not to be supposed that this specimen, obtuse in all matters except cattle and money, could divine that the poor little fool was crying out her heart because she loved the very man she had calumniated and sent away.

Hartwell did not wait for Len to come to the office, but slowly made his way toward the stables.

At nightfall the boys had turned their ponies into a large circular corral which was walled on one side by a long low shed. Usually Len had no difficulty in catching his faithful Comet, but to-night a satantic spirit possessed the whole bunch. Two hindrances in the guise of helpers were perched on the high pole fence, holding

aloft their flickering lanterns, which cast fitful, blinding beams across the backs of the running horses and in the corners of the dark shed. Len, in their midst, made one throw after another, his lasso hissing through the shadows like a snake, but his usually unerring aim was powerless in the treacherous light. There were perhaps twenty of the gleeful little brutes, now dodging this way, now that, now huddling in a corner with Comet buried deep in their midst, only to dash snorting and defiant past the cluster of snubbing posts in the center and into the depths of the shed again.

"Say, you fellows, make yourselves scarce and put out them lanterns," said Len crossly and, when they did as he bade, he entered the corral armed only with a bridle and a handful of sugar which he kept hidden in a secret niche of the stable. He gave a curious little whistle. It was evidently familiar to one of the now quiet and watchful band, for there was a stir and an answering whinny and by the light of the stars, a horse was seen to trot forward. Soon Len was receiving his "time" and, as was proper

to Cattle Land, taking a brief, unemotional farewell of his friends.

"It's only a little difference, Len. I expect you back soon," said Hartwell with cringing humility.

The young cow-puncher's curt "Thank you" gave him little hope, and his downcast comrades knew that they might never see him again. Hadn't Corduroy Bill gone off one day and never been heard of since?

"Where you goin'?" whispered Wiggy, as Len tied the sack containing all his worldly goods on the back of his saddle.

"To Powder River—the Circle-Arrow. If I get a job, shall I ring you in?"

"You bet," said the delighted Wiggy, taking a crosscut from despair to joy, and he gave Len a terrific jab in the ribs by way of an affectionate farewell.

In another moment the clatter of Comet's hoofs had died away in the night.

CHAPTER VIII

For 't is sweet to stammer one letter
Of the Eternal's language;—on earth it is callèd
Forgiveness.
BISHOP TEGNER (Translated by Longfellow).—
The Children of the Lord's Supper.

"There! There! Master's good dog. Just a minute now. Open his mouth a bit wider, Dougal."

The setter kept his eyes on William's face, their expression of deep patience and trust shadowed with wincing agony. At every turn of the pinchers he gave the tiny cry of a suffering child, but he remained passive in Dougal's grasp, and the yellow brown eyes never left his master's face.

"They're shure meeserable things; just like feesch hooks a' tha ind. Leetle wider, ye poor beastie," and Dougal's voice was full of compassion as he pried the mouth of the tortured creature.

"Are you sure it was Naya's porcupine,"

asked William, extracting a wickedly barbed quill, so deeply imbedded in the dog's tongue that only a small portion had been visible.

"Yes. Packs was a' tha hoose when it happened. Hannah came a tha corral for me, an' she said he came into tha kitchen a cryin' an' a pawin' his nose, an' noticin' tha bristles, she ran into Naya's room an' tha uncanny beastie still had his war bonnet a stickin' oop straight, an' his eyes like dots o' fire. It's fine freends wi' Tweedie and yon leetle doe, but I've often thocht this wud happen to wan of tha ither dogs."

"I have been apprehensive too, and I told Naya a week ago that he is growing so fast he has become dangerous. She was so upset that I haven't had the heart to take a definite step, but I *must* protect the dogs, and what is more, even though it seems absolutely harmless with her, some day it may have a violent moment and shoot her full of these wretched things."

When the last quill was drawn, William rose from the block where he had been sitting and, with thoughtful eyes, watched the dog as he ground his smarting muzzle in the sand before

the shop door. He twirled the pinchers uncertainly and finally said,

"I think I will go for a little hunt before dinner. The fresh meat is almost gone, and one of the boys saw deer tracks a mile west. I wish while I am gone, you would take your rifle and put an end to that little monster. Naya has gone up to see Mrs. Carver, and this is a good chance." He began arranging the tools over the carpenter's desk as if he had asked something amiable and of every day occurrence.

Dougal's kind eyes emitted sparks of indignation, and he all but said, "Do it yir sel'," but like the loyal devoted henchman he was, he merely muttered, "Very weel, sir," and gloomily made his way toward the house, while William, full of remorse and discomfort for having inflicted the tender hearted Scotchman with such a distasteful task, fled on Rajah through the broken country to the west, far from the scene.

Meanwhile the children were on their way to the lone cabin in the gulch, two miles away. Arthur, holding a great sack of provisions on the front of his saddle, watched Naya as she balanced herself on one foot, laughing and sway-

ing to the motion of the horse. The sagacious Pigeon in blanket and surcingle, trotted along as carefully as a juggler bearing a porcelain vase on his head and a brother trickster on either shoulder.

"Oh!" she said, slipping to the saddle with a little rush. "It is the arms which make steady and this coat takes the freedom."

November chill filled the morning air, and two pale sun dogs spoke menacingly of the weather's intent. The first thin shroud of snow seemed to reflect the dreary sky, which bent closely to the earth like a haunting ashen face, and the stubble of the wide, deserted cornfields gashed the snow with black jagged blades. A flock of snowbuntings skimmed a nearby hill, while a hungry hawk hovered watchfully above their heads.

Naya's crimson hood and cloak gave the dull scene its only touch of color and her ripple of talk and laughter were like the sudden flash of sun-touched water.

Arthur had never quite forgiven her for not awakening him the memorable night of the first fall storm, and he began speaking of it now.

"Jiminy! It must have been just like a scene in the theater. Once I went to a matinee in Lancaster, and when the villain came on the stage—he was kind of a pirate with a peaked cap and brass rings in his ears—why, there was the awfulest storm. The fiddles shivered like anything and when the thunder banged, I went up straight in the air and came down with a ca-chug. I thought he had me sure."

Naya had never been to the theater, but her quick imagination saw the dramatic possibilities of her adventure.

"For Christmas!" she exclaimed, "Surely what fun to have a little theater show. You shall be Red Deer to peek in the window while I read, and I will show you to look scared as he did when father did open wide the door. Father shall play himself, for he was most grand—just like the king in the ragged fairy book, except for the so tight red stockings and the red velvet coat thing."

The plan of a Christmas "show" was a joyful prospect to Arthur, but he shook his head dubiously.

"I know you aren't scared about the Indians

stealing you. You are *such* a funny girl," and he looked at her in perplexity. "But Uncle William is never easy a moment. In the evening when he sits reading, he starts and listens at every sound, and often he goes out and beats around in the brush for an hour. I helped him last night."

"You did?" she asked with startled eyes.

"Yes, I did, and he has taken Len off the line riding crew and for the past week he has done nothing but scour the country for Indian signs."

She was silent a moment.

"I was most to dying with fright when I saw the face at the window; my heart turned dead and heavy as a stone, but after father knew, it was all right. Someway, I am only scared when things happen. It is most foolish, I think, to be ever anxious and afraid that something dreadful may happen. I grow to like Len more to more. He has such quick, funny little thoughts, and his heart flows with kindness. Do you know why he and Mr. Hartwell are friends not longer, and why he comes here to live?"

Len's reticent admissions had given Arthur an idea, but he evaded the question by saying,

"There is his laundry hanging on Mrs. Carver's bushes. I should say he is kind, and he has such a way of making people feel comfortable. He knows Mrs. Carver is awful poor and awful proud too, so he just rode up to her door one day and rapped with his quirt end. When he found she was there, he got down and took off his hat as if she was a grand lady and told her it would be a great favor if she would do his laundry. She is a mighty nice woman and was so thankful. I was along. He pays her twice as much as See Yup charges. You bet, he is bully."

A turn in the wood road, which wandered up the gulch, had brought them in sight of a lonely log cabin. It had a curious shrinking expression and clung to the hillside as if life had been too much for it, and it besought all to pass by and leave it in peace. The handful of aged, stunted pines which bent about it seemed to realize the farce of their custody, and defeat and hopelessness emanated from every gnarled and dying branch. It was Hannah's old home. A few years before, when the setting sun foreshadowed not only darkness but danger, and twilight found the cabins of the scattered pio-

neers fortified like castles of old, Hannah had lived here with her husband and little girl. It was then that the Northern Cheyennes were making a last stand for their beloved hunting grounds, and it was then that Hannah found herself widowed and childless. It is too terrible to detail. The little girl had gone far over the hills with her father, and she found them a day later. Troops were in the country, and the Indians made for the fastnesses of the Bighorn Mountains, slaying all in their pathway, but not daring to turn aside, so Hannah had been saved. William had come across her in Montana, where she was preparing to go back to Kentucky, but although she had determined to leave the West forever, Naya's exquisite childhood had so touched her that she had altered her plans, and now a new mother love was filling her devastated life.

Arthur tied the ponies to a tree, and Naya ran to the door, which was opened by a little woman in a faded but spotless calico dress, surmounted by the "glorious morning face" that beloved Stevenson exhorts us to ever put between our troubles and the world.

"Why, Miss Naya," she said with delight, "and if there ain't Mr. Arthur, too. Come right in and set down by the fire. I do believe it is goin' to snow, it's that gray and dark."

Her little brood crowded around in shy excitement. Bessie and John, the latter a substantial boy of twelve and the family standby now that Jim had gone to Sundance to work in the mines, lingered in the background, while the two younger tots clung tight to their mother's skirts. A vivid-eyed little girl of seven edged up to Naya and felt of her coat.

"Is it plush?" she questioned.

"No, just plain cloth, but inside it is most soft with fur of the squirrel. Father did play a joke to me. It was made to Chicago, and when it did come three days ago, he did turn the fur side out and fix it like an animal in my room. I was most astonished when I did see it."

She slipped it off and sank into the old-fashioned wood rocker by the fireplace, now blazing with the sagebrush John had been lavishly heaping. The burning brush filled the room with a strange aromatic odor, as repugnant to some as it is delicious to others, and Naya sniffed

rapturously while the English Arthur, still an alien in some things, wondered how long he would have to endure it. It was the first time he had been in the cabin, for, owing to the feud existing between Jim and himself, his visits had been confined to brief calls at the door. While the little children, rescued from their dumb shyness by Naya's charm, patted and kissed and cooed over the squirrel lining, he glanced about the room.

There was a partition at one end with a door which evidently led into a sleeping room, and the rough boards were thickly spattered with colored newspaper prints and the geographical picture cards which, at that time, formed the principal inducement of a popular and cheap brand of coffee. They represented all the states and territories in the Union and, from where he sat, Arthur could plainly discern ferocious buffalo and Indians dashing madly around the map of Nebraska. There were impossibly slim ladies in costumes of dove gray broadcloth and emerald velvet which "fitted like a glove," and startling suggestions for masquerade costumes,

"Night" and "Morning" being the favorite themes.

Arthur, of course, did not know it, but everywhere there were tokens of that quaint old time country life in the East. On the floor were a few bits of worn rag carpet, and a homemade bed in one corner was covered with a spread woven in shades of rich blue and white, the border of which repeated over and over, like the song of an old bell, "Liberty. Liberty. Liberty." The back of the wooden chair in which Naya frolicked with the babies was painted with bright pink roses, and on the shelf above the fire was a stuffed red bird, who dwelt boldly in the outer air, as if rejoicing that a lunge of the old schooner into a Wyoming cattle trail had brought his glass-domed edifice crashing on his head, thus setting him free forever. He looked fearfully out of place, not that they ever look *in* place, museums not excepted, but just here his gaudy assurance was doubly insolent, for, despite the brave-faced woman and the extreme cleanliness, the undercurrent of sorrow and poverty was painfully evident.

Arthur suddenly became conscious that

Naya's sweet tact was preparing a way to the sack.

"It is good that I have the new kitty coat for my old one is terrible. It is no use to me more, and you make so pretty rugs with old things that I did bring it. Dougal has the plan to go to town soon, and he says he can sell another at the store."

Arthur untied the sack for her, and she took out a brown winter coat with a beaver collar. It was somewhat worn, to be sure, but still an excellent garment.

Bessie's blue eyes suddenly lost their soft shyness and she said joyfully, "Oh, mamma, it is just what I need. You surely won't tear it for a rug."

Mrs. Carver was speechless with gratitude and, with tears in her eyes, she planted a hearty kiss on Naya's glowing cheek. The latter took no notice but, chatting gaily, drew one article after another from the great sack; old trousers and shirts for the rug making, packages of tea and dried fruit and sugar, a piece of bacon and one of venison and, best of all, a paper of striped

stick candy and chalky white hearts, with their calfish inscriptions ever the delight of childhood.

"Old Tom goes to find wood to-morrow and he will leave potatoes and flour. The last rug pays for all and this besides," and she deftly changed the subject as she slipped an envelope into Mrs. Carver's hand.

"I think I die if the Christmas hurry not. You are all to come to the river house, for Santa Claus is in a so terrible hurry and it saves the time. It is a so big country."

The four-year-old baby, much besmeared with peppermint candy, climbed hastily to her knee in pie-eyed excitement, for he too had heard of Santa Claus. Naya rocked and hugged him in ecstacy, stickiness and all, while Arthur and John discussed the merits of the different kinds of Christmas trees.

"The silver fir," said Naya, sitting up, "it is as if the Great Spirit dipped it in the moon beams, and it goes straight up—up," and she gave a look and a gesture that eloquently described the aspiring character of the most beautiful tree that adorns the mountains.

"There are to be bananas—two whole

bunches; father did send for them," she continued in another voice, "and apples—real red apples, and oranges, and candles everywhere on the tree of silver." Then she and the baby rocked and hugged some more.

"What's 'nanas?" asked the latter, suddenly.

"They are long, and yellow like the cottonwood in the falling leaf time, and where they grow, a thousand sleeps from here, there are bright green birds big like that," opening wide her arms, "and they make speech as do people, and there are millions of trees covered with flowers, and monkeys with funny faces running through them on their tails."

"My doodness," said the baby, his eyes bigger than ever, "does the 'nanas run on their tails too?"

There was such a shriek of laughter that baby Sammy slipped from her lap and ran to the window to hide his embarrassment, for he had evidently made a dreadful mistake, but at the sight of the transformed out-of-doors, he speedily forgot about it.

"I dess Dod's wife is makin' bwead to-day and 'pilled her flour," he announced reflectively,

and at the sight of the snow Naya sprang up and slipped into her things.

"Have a little bite with us, my dear," urged kind Mrs. Carver, but Naya thought of Pigeon unsheltered in the storm and of her father's anxiety if they did not return.

In two minutes after mounting their horses the cabin and fringe of pines became invisible. It was strangely dark, and sometimes they almost lost their breath, for the atmosphere had become heavy with snow as fine as powder.

"This beats me," said Arthur, peering for the trail.

"Give Alder the rein. He and Pigeon find the way alone."

They rode on silently through the increasing cold, trusting to the instinct of the horses, for the path and the different landmarks were fast disappearing.

"This is the longest two miles I ever rode," muttered Arthur finally.

"Get down and feel for the trail," said Naya in a puzzled voice, for she too had begun to feel bewildered.

Arthur knelt in front of Alder, who pulled

obstinately on his rein, when some one stumbled over him, and he and Len found themselves tumbling in the snow.

"Jiminy crickets," said the astonished boy, "how'd you get way off here?"

"Way off here?" repeated Len amazed, "why you're within a hundred feet of the stable. I'm on my way to the house."

"Well, this beats me," said Arthur slowly, trying to readjust his thoughts, for he and Naya both imagined they were wandering aimlessly in some remote gulch.

Naya's hands were almost frost bitten and she danced with pain as her father rubbed them with snow. He tried to divert her by giving an account of his short and successful deer hunt, and she was telling him about Sammy and "Dod's wife," when she suddenly broke off—

"I must go fix a more warmer—warmer place for little porcupine. It is most cold to my room."

Dinner would not be ready for half an hour, and Dougal sat by the window reading. He and William exchanged a sudden guilty glance. Len had picked up a paper too, for Hannah had

invited him to abandon for once See Yup's excellent though monotonous fare, but he did not read. He was thinking of that long ride he had made a month ago, following the trail that led straight over the Bighorns. He was seeing again a great lustrous star hanging just above the summit. It seemed to beckon to the homeless wanderer, and his heart had grown reverent with the thought of a something just beyond those star-crowned mountains, a something vaguely different and high and beautiful. For years he had roamed from the Columbia to the Mississippi, on the deserts of Nevada and the rich prairies of the Dakotas, and through all the dangers and temptations of frontier life, this longing had groped steadily in the darkness.

William realized something of this and more, and had told Len of the danger that threatened Naya, knowing that his intelligence and loyalty would be an added strength in the defense that guarded her.

Len sat so absorbed in his thoughts that he did not observe the glance that passed between the other two men.

Soon Naya came rushing down the steps that led to her room.

"Len," she questioned anxiously, "have you seen my little porcupine?"

"Not since yesterday," he replied.

"Dougal have you seen him?"

The big Scotchman's ruddy face had turned a trifle pale, but he decided that, in this case, frankness was the better part of valor.

"Bairnie dear, if ye could hae seen Packs wi' his poor mouth an' nose fool o' quills, ye wud forgie me. I just had to do it to protect tha animals."

She became perfectly white.

"You did kill him, Dougal, my dear little porcupine?"

"Yes, lassie, I had to."

She turned away with a dazed expression, as if she could not realize what he said. Then she wheeled, swept by a sudden storm of anger. Her dark eyes turned a purplish black and floods of color came and went. She leaped at Dougal like a little panther and seizing his newspaper, snatched it into a hundred bits.

"You are horrible. You are full of hate. I hope the Great Spirit sends a curse. I—"

"Naya," said her father sternly, "come," and taking her by the arm, he led her to the door of her room. "When you are ready to apologize to Dougal, you may come out, but until then I must ask you to stay in your room. It was I who had the little monster killed, so you have nothing to blame Dougal for."

"I—I hope the Great Spirit curses you too, then," she gasped, as he shut the door.

There was a sudden wild burst of weeping, then absolute quiet.

Len forgot Hannah's hospitality and dashed through the snow toward the stables. The rest ate their meal in agitated silence. Even William never witnessed such an outburst of her temper, but despite his displeasure and stern resolutions, his heart ached for her. He knew that she adored all her pets and that only sorrow could have driven her to such an extremity. So by his desire, Hannah, weeping furtively, arranged a little tray and softly opening her door, slipped it in without speaking.

The storm continued unceasingly. Arthur

and Dougal worked in the shop, but William, miserable and restless, stayed in the sitting room and waited. After two dragging hours, during which papers, books and accounts all seemed equally flat and uninteresting, he softly approached her door. He had pictured her sobbing quietly over her loss with melting wrath and a leaning toward apology and freedom, but to his astonishment, the strange child had tricked herself in the most startling barbaric splendor she could find and was practicing little Indian dances before a mirror. She wore a curious dress of woven silk grass, elaborate with feather embroidery, and over her shoulders was a robe of doeskin dressed until it was almost as fine as white satin. The part in her hair was painted a brilliant scarlet, and there were daubs of red and yellow on her cheeks and brow. In her hair a single plume waved with graceful defiance as, with noiseless moccasined feet, she went through the curious steps. The tray remained untouched on the floor, and when she caught sight of her father in the mirror, the purplish light in her eyes deepened,

and without noticing him further, she broke into a fiercely gay song.

"Not much sign of repentance here," William thought grimly, as he shut the door. He walked about absently, then suddenly throwing himself into a chair, he put his head down on the table and sobbed like a child. "Little wife, little wife, why didn't you stay to help me with her, what shall I do, what shall I do?"

The outer door was suddenly thrown open. "Three men have come in almost froze," said Len. "I think they ought to be brought in here, for it's nearer than the bunk house and we'll have to 'bout carry 'em."

"To be sure. Where are they?" and William hastily caught up his hat while Len took quick note of his distressed face and the still closed door.

"Right here. Dougal and Arthur are tryin' to help 'em along."

The poor fellows had become so dazed and exhausted that they could help themselves but little. They were carried to the house and laid on the sitting room floor, where Hannah arranged quilts and blankets, and then all went

to work with snow and hot whisky. When the numbness began to yield, they groaned and screamed with pain. It was frightful, for the rescuers were powerless to help them. They could only await the effect of their simple treatment.

"Now more toddy and blankets and by and by they will get to sleep," said William, bandaging a maimed hand.

"Here," said Naya, running down the steps and dragging her snowy bedding after her, "and Hannah, I know to fix the toddy," and she sped toward the kitchen, her doeskin robe dropping to the floor as she ran. She soon returned, her eyes full of tears and heavenly sympathy.

When the last draught of whisky had been administered and the patients had become quiet in their soothing bandages and warm blankets, she came shyly to her father.

"Please, you and Dougal in my room."

They followed her in silence, and when they entered, she closed the door and bravely faced the two grave men.

"I cannot speak my heart. It is full. I was so terrible because of the death of a little animal.

It was dear, but they are people and it is nothing to such suffering. I speak not what I mean, but my heart is full of sorrow and I ask to kiss you both and to be forgiven."

CHAPTER IX

We ring the bells and we raise the strain,
We hang up garlands everywhere
And bid the tapers twinkle fair,
And feast and frolic—and then we go
Back to the same old lives again.

SUSAN COOLIDGE—*Christmas.*

Christmas morning! Every particle of moisture had congealed in the crystalline atmosphere, and the rising sun thrust its lances of pale gold through an exquisite film of falling frost. It was like the robe of a princess of ancient Syria, its snowy shower gleaming and flashing with oriental splendor. At the thought, the heavy odor of spice and rose floated through William's senses, and he was once more wandering in a garden of Damascus whither, as a boy of fifteen, he had journeyed with his father.

"See, it is a fern—a tiny fairy fern. Look, father, all the stars of the sky are falling."

"How beautiful!" he replied, examining the strange little frost designs that had fallen on her sleeve. He had called her out to the river

porch to see the rare and lovely spectacle, which was already being brushed away by the order of His Royal Majesty, the Winter Sun. It now struck the world ablaze with Christmas joy. The icebound river, swept bare of snow, twisted like a strip of pale blue gauze between gigantic forests of white branch coral, studded with a million jewels. The little evergreens became monstrous clusters of snowballs rolled in diamond dust, and lakes of palpitating light danced on the surface of the snowy plain. Far down the river a hay wagon slowly circled in a herd of bawling cattle, and a man was cutting a hole in the ice, that they might drink.

"Melly Clismas, Missy," said See Yup from the door.

"Merry Christmas, you bad See Yup, you did beat me. Is the tree to the house yet?"

"In the house," corrected William, catching her by the shoulders and giving her a little shake as he followed her in the doorway. "Your English is going to be the death of me. I never heard anything like it. It is neither Indian English nor cow-puncher English."

But she ran ahead without answering.

Dougal and Len were dragging a beautiful silver fir up the little stairway that led to her room. It had been brought to Naya a few days since from the slopes of Cloud Peak.

"Let me in before," she said, climbing over the tall lower branches that waved in the doorway.

Arthur was already there, moving the furniture, and Naya, snatching off her wraps, fell to helping him.

"Right by the pool," she directed, and soon the noble tree, silvered as with delicate frost, reared its head to the ridge pole of the slanting roof.

She drew a great box of trinkets from under the bed. Surely no Christmas tree was ever so strangely arrayed. For each and every one she had made a little beaded pouch, or belt, or hat band, and they hung and trailed fantastically among the silvery branches. There were no strings of shining balls and tinsel, but there were candles in abundance, and Hannah added snowy ropes of popcorn and little red apples bristling aggressively with fat brown cloves.

"Is it not most wonderful?" breathed Naya to Len, when the others had departed.

"Yepee-ee," he answered with an enthusiasm as great as hers, and, throwing his hat high in the air, he juggled and dodged until it fell square on his head again.

"Let me try it," said Arthur, returning with an armful of greens.

"An' I'll beat ye all," and Dougal let fall by the fireplace his weight of logs long enough "to mend a mill," as Scotch Bobby says.

It would never do to be left out of the game, so Naya swept a hat from its peg, and they jostled and shoved and giggled like a lot of schoolboys. William, returning from his room with a mountainous burden of packages, promptly dashed into the fun, and Len's joyous voice breaking into the classic, "O Caroline, Caroline, can you dance the pea vine?" the rest joined in with enthusiasm.

"Melly Clis—" began See Yup, who thought that salutation proper for each recurring encounter, but when he saw them, his chronic grin froze to his face and his almond eyes started from their sockets.

As if to further prove their idiocy, Len's hat fell into the pool with a splash and, without going to its rescue, he and William only scuffled the harder for the one that remained between them. The uncanny "Caroline" uproar and the shower of hats continued. Could this be the secretly worshiped "Missa Dunmel," he whose gold-leafed image was enshrined in his bosom side by side with the Confucius of his fathers? Was this his idol in gray tweed, whose keenness of eye and a certain leanness of cheek alone proclaimed that he belonged to this frontier world and not to some paradisic clime, where the rice fields and bamboo sprouts endure the year around? His Asiatic wits stampeded entirely. The "Melicans" had gone crazy. It was no longer a fit place for a follower of Confucius and order. He gave a sudden gurgling howl and, turning to flee, almost knocked Hannah flat on the floor. She understood the situation at once and, dropping to the threshold, laughed until she cried. The rioters rushed to her rescue in dire alarm.

"See Yup," she managed to say, "I reckon

he is climbing Cloud Peak by this time. He saw you all and thought you were crazy."

Len was dispatched to head him off.

"I'll ride Firefly. He's the best runner," he called over his shoulder, and tore for the bunk house.

See Yup was locked in his room.

"Say, old fellow," said Len, knocking on the door, "we're all right, honest. We ain't luny. It's just 'cause it's Christmas and we were foolin'. Come on out."

Partly reassured, the Chinaman opened the door a few inches, revealing the butcher knife tightly clutched in his hand. He had wrested it from the wall above the sink in his frantic flight through the kitchen.

"Honest, it ain't nothin'. Come on back to the house," continued Len.

Suddenly Yup's blanched face relaxed in its customary grin.

"Me tinkee you gone clazee. Only play. You Melicans so damee funee," and they returned to the river house and their Christmas preparations.

With a cordiality that was truly democratic,

William had invited the bunk house inmates to dine there to-day, and the dining room was striped from end to end with a long white table. Naya was busy trying to construct a fruit castle for a centerpiece. Its lines were to follow the marvelous architecture of a pictured wonder she had found in one of her father's books, "Les Chateaux de France." To her great disgust each red and yellow turret was no sooner reared to a respectable height than it fell with a series of bumps, and her building materials went rolling off to the four corners of the room.

"Crys-an-the-mum, crys-an-the-mum," she crooned softly, as she gathered up the runaway apples preparatory to another attempt.

"What did you say, honey?" asked Hannah, coming in with the refilled sugar bowls

"I make practice. So long word is crys-an-the-mum," and Naya, kneeling on a chair, bent to her recaptured pile. "I did say to father how sorry I am that the Moon of Snows left no flowers for the table. Hannah, did you ever see a crys-an-the-mum? The shops to—in the big, big London are full of them, and lilies of the valley, and American beauty roses. Father did

say it. The lilies of the valley are most like the Solomon's seal of the cañons, and the American beauty roses have color like the wild roses here —the dark pink ones, only many, many petals. But I would love to see the crys-an-the-mum, crys-an-the-mum," and she began to sing softly, while the bright castle walls again took up their unsteady existence.

"I used to see them in Louisville," said Hannah, counting out the places, "the father of one of my little pupils had a flower shop, and each week when I went to give her her music lesson, she gave me a lovely flower, sometimes a rose, sometimes a crysanthemum. They lived in some little rooms behind the store."

"Is it nice to play the so queer thing with the great white teeth?" Naya was so anxious about her toppling workmanship that she did not notice the sadness that shadowed Hannah's face.

"Yes, honey, but I gave that up long ago."

Notwithstanding the many renunciations and the terrible tragedy which terminated her marriage, she had never regretted sacrificing for the venturesome but lovable Tom Warren, her quiet life in Louisville, with its little music lessons and

lace work. But sometimes she was desperately hungry for the music which, even though almost untrained, had ever been a natural expression of her deep and reserved nature. Her face brightened.

"You know, your father has promised us a little piano, honey dear, and then you will learn to play. It can't come over the roads until spring though—there, poor childie." Bumpety bump went the "Chateau de France." "See Yup and I will fix it. You run and dress. The new warm white one, you know, with the white stockings and red sash. Dougal has gone for the little Carvers. I heard the sleigh bells a few minutes ago."

"And red feather?" pleaded Naya.

"One!" said Hannah, laughing and holding up her forefinger. "Some day you will go to England to see Grandmother Dunsmuir, and I reckon she will have hysterics if you appear with your hair stuck full of feathers."

"I go never to England," returned Naya passionately, "I stay forever with the mountains and you." And she hugged Hannah close.

The whole house had been transformed into a

bower of fragrant evergreen, and she took long deep breaths as she ran to her room.

"My, how I do love nice smells and I so *adore* the Christmas," she said to herself as she rebraided her long hair.

Turning to lift her dress from its drawer, she caught sight of her mother's face and walked slowly toward it, her beautiful eyes glowing with an inner light. She thought of nothing, said nothing, but, with a heart full of unutterable love, knelt on the bed and put her cheek to the softly outlined one in the picture.

William came in and found them thus.

"We always think of her. We always wish she were here, don't we, little one?" he whispered, clasping her tight.

"But she *is* here," said Naya, looking at him, while an invisible aureole seemed to shed its mystic light on her face. "In the night she comes with her arms full of silk grass and goldenrod, and we do play and talk together."

William turned away. He too had dreams, but there was always the lonely awakening.

After the new frock was buttoned and admired, she bound her brow with a narrow strip

of ermine and fastened to it the one permitted plume.

"Does English grandmother have often the hysterics?" she questioned.

He was watching her intently. She had grown so tall—so different, and her beauty startled him.

"Why?" he laughed, but he did not hear her answer.

There was a faint tinkle of bells growing more and more distinct, and, as she spoke, she rushed down the steps and to the door, just as a bob-sled, drawn by two great bays, came swinging up to the house. The little Carvers spilled out like pebbles from a gourd, and Naya hugged each grotesque bundle in turn.

"Like a masquerade," she thought, wondering which was which. "Santa Claus won't let us see the tree until after the dinner, so we will play here until the hour is gone," she said, helping the happy Mrs. Carver strip them of their disguises.

Len and Wiggy (alas for Mr. Hartwell, the friends had been united) had insisted on helping See Yup "shoot the biscuits," so Hannah

was "to play lady," as she said, and she certainly looked one as she came in directly in her old black silk dress, her abundant hair, now heavily streaked with gray, crowning the strong refined face.

That hour was the longest the children had ever experienced, and they took turns holding Dougal's watch. Finally Len, splendid in slicked hair and new red neckerchief, summoned them to the dining room and a sudden clang of the bell followed by a faint whoop told them that the bunk house faction was on its way.

Mindful of Naya's lamentations regarding the flowers, made several days before, Hannah and William had planned a little surprise for her, and when the child saw the miniature Christmas tree in the center of the table, she gave a cry of delight and astonishment. Surely nothing ever fashioned by nature was so exquisitely symmetrical as that little tree. From its feathery crest it sloped and widened until the lower branches blended their silver green with the white tablecloth, and the dancing, glowing lights gave it such a fairylike appearance that

the air seemed to tinkle with elfish music. Myriads of butterflies, looking as if they had floated in on a summer breeze, were balancing their bright wings in the golden sheen of light, and if they had come fluttering and shimmering about her head, Naya would not have been surprised. Hannah's reluctant admission that they were not real, that Mrs. Santa Claus had fashioned them from bits of paper and water colors, was met with wonderment and admiration for that Northern dame's skill.

The hungry rush from the bunk house had slackened in the near vicinity of the "boss," and the erstwhile whooping cow-punchers came stringing in as shyly and uncomfortably as if it were a funeral instead of a feast. Some, like boys late to Sunday school, curled up their toes and walked on the sides of their feet to keep their boots from creaking, which elicited muffled sniggers from two or three of the more observing and humorous. The general costume of brand-new overalls and flannel shirt was topped brilliantly with fresh silk handkerchiefs, blue spattered with orange, and scarlet predominating, while their dull red, weather-beaten faces

were scrubbed until they resembled polished mahogany. Despite the variety of nationality and type, their faces, mostly young, bore a strange similarity of expression and line, that spoke of like occupation and mutual dangers, dangers ever confronted with courage and characteristic lack of complaint. But the climax of elegance was viewed when Wiggy rushed in from the kitchen arrayed in amazing store clothes, the superfluous inches of both trouser and sleeve being visibly tucked and turned under, while in startling contrast to his mop of unruly red hair was a ready-made necktie of bright blue satin. After a gay flourish of his napkin he turned to steady a candle flickering in the hemlock boughs on the wall, and all the world was free to read the following placard, which some mischievous fellow cow-puncher had pinned to the new coat:

"I've jined the biled shirt aristocracy, by gosh."

There was a roar of laughter from the cow-punchers who, instantly recollecting the terrifying presence of "women folk," sank again into glum and paralyzed silence. But it did not

last. Their tongues loosened when all had found seats and See Yup, with his two helpers, brought in the great roasted turkeys and geese. The Chinaman's decorative turn of mind had devised ruffles of green and red paper for their fat brown legs, giving them the comical appearance of portly females in old-fashioned pantalets, who were about to rise and balance to corners.

"See the turkey, Sammy," said Mrs. Carver, who held the baby in her lap.

"Ish it Raggy Moses, Mr. Camera?" he asked of Dougal, who was carving at Naya's end of the table.

"Shure," said the big Scotchman with a twinkle in his eye, "an' if ye find him gude we'll bring in a set o' harness next."

Naya shook her head reassuringly and patted the chubby hand on the tablecloth. She sat at one end of the long table, banked on either side with rows of hungry but polite little Carvers, and as long as she lived, she never forgot how they ate. Conversation had no further interest for them, and they retired to ram and cram their little pouches until those receptacles,

having often faced and felt starvation, must have thought an avalanche had struck them.

"Say, Wiggy," said the new ranch wit from Poison Spider Creek as, having performed his task, the elaborately gotten up waiter sank into his place, "I was over on your range not long ago, and say, do you remember that queer lookin' butte a little to the west o' Cactus Draw?"

Wiggy's blue eyes and blue necktie were all attention.

"Oh, sure," he said eagerly, "it's got a funny kind of a rim o' white clay stuff around the top."

"No not that one. It's kind o' peaked like and there's cracks in it deep enough to swaller a man, horse and all."

The newcomer evidently had an exciting incident to relate, and the roast goose and the new apple sauce were abandoned by all within hearing.

"Now I know," said the unsuspecting Wiggy, "big black cracks. Look like an earthquake done it. You don't mean to say that some one fell into one?"

"Well, sir," said the smarty, growing dra-

matic, "that butte was there when I come into the country."

There was a wild din of appreciation from all except Len. The good-natured, freckle faced little Wiggy, with his honest, merry ways and extravagant dress, was loved and even admired by all. In fact, his skill and dexterity as a broncho buster were so great that his winter task was the breaking of a vicious herd of wild ponies, that they might be ready for the spring round-up. But a certain innocence and inborn credulity had ever made him the butt of cow-puncher jokes. Len thought it went too far sometimes. This Poison Spider smarty had been picking on him for a week, and it was time he realized that there were two in the game. After a diplomatic lapse of time, Len took up the thread of conversation.

"Washakie, did you say? You bet, he's a fine old chief. Sent his son into a Sioux fight to get honor and scalps and things. He got a hundred arrows in his hide instead, and the old fellow's hair turned plumb white in a night. And once one of his mother-in-laws argued with him. He just struck her stone dead, and his

wife loved him more than ever. Rummy old chap all right. Speakin' of Washakie, has any of you fellows ever been over in the Needles?"

None but Wiggy had ever penetrated the mysterious mountains alluded to.

"There's things over there a sight more wonderful than any I ever saw. Why, the bubblin' paint pots and the shinin' waters of the Yellowstone geysers ain't anything in comparison. It would take a greater word slinger 'n me to picture it. But probably you've heard about it before," and he helped himself to wild plum jam as if he had no desire to bore them with twice told tales.

"I ain't never heerd. Go ahead," said the smarty, out of mingled curiosity and assumed politeness. He was anxious to found his popularity on every rock that presented itself.

"Well," said Len, addressing himself thoughtfully to his victim, "it's certainly curious what nature can do. Of course you've seen petrified trees, they're all over the bloomin' country, but what do you think of petrified rattlesnakes, rattles and all?"

"Well," said the credulous newcomer, "that's sure curious. Could you count the rattles?"

"Sure," returned Len, beginning to warm to his subject in earnest, "I counted one monster with eighteen rattles on it. But that ain't all. Not far away I saw a tamarack tree—tall and bare, you know—and on its top branch sat a hawk plumb petrified, and right on the slope of the hill under it stood a big bull elk. Evidently it was a makin' that kind o' sad whistling noise when the stone turnin' process struck him, for the sound was right there petrified in the air. You could hear it plain."

Even William joined in the roar of laughter at the expense of the discomfited wit, and Arthur, who warmly seconded Len's championship of the easily imposed upon Wiggy, started in his fresh young voice the familiar

> "'T is a tenderfootie foot
> Let's daub his face with soot
> His mamma 'll wash him clean
> He's still too young to wean," etc.

through some forty-eleven verses, more or less. The cow-punchers all joined in, and the long room, heavy with the incense of Christmas hem-

lock and spruce, echoed gayly with the rough, harmonious music. After the huge plum pudding, in its swirling blue flames, had disappeared, and the fragrant bananas had "run on their tails" into the various pockets, by this time the only available receptacles, the company resorted to Naya's room where Arthur, as self-appointed torchbearer, had preceded them.

Silence again engulfed the bunk house element. Overawed by the fantastically beautiful room, each tiptoed shyly to his seat. None besides Len had ever penetrated this part of the river house, and they felt the shadow of mystery.

The story of Dunsmuir's marriage had been rumored in various ways. Some said she was not an Indian at all, but the daughter of a French voyageur, and that she had been stolen and held captive by the Sioux, from whom Dunsmuir rescued her. Their hairbreadth escapes had furnished themes for many an imaginative yarn spinner. She had spent only one year at the ranch, and the few who had seen her said that she certainly did not resemble any squaws they had ever seen. She was brown to be sure. but so was every one in Wyo-

ming; however, her ways were certainly Indian enough, for she pined in the house, and she had never adopted the dress of the white woman. They had heard rumors of a great room he had built for her, with a cascade and a pond at one end. Such a crazy idea, and then think of the trouble of piping the water down from the spring. Anyway, she wasn't English, as the child's straight hair and dark, shining eyes testified.

They one and all had tremendous respect for Dunsmuir, even though he *was* afflicted with all sorts of disgraceful and ridiculous habits; drinking tea in the morning, for instance, and carrying a book in his pocket even on the round-up, just like a sissy schoolmaster. But in spite of these drawbacks they trusted and liked him, for he was always "hail fellow well met," worked as hard as any of them and, above all, he was endowed with the great and stern qualities of justice and courage which characterize the true frontiersman. None had ever heard him speak of his marriage. Probably Len Douglas knew more than he let on, for he was pretty solid with the river house folks. In fact, he didn't

seem to have any job in particular, except to ride among the hills on the best horses the ranch afforded. They glanced furtively about them, as in a dream, but the lights dancing on the murmuring cascade and on the strange picture —a woman's face among the pines, did not clear away the mystery.

But there was little time for reflection, for a jingle of bells was heard on the bridge leading to the tree house, and in another moment Santa Claus had thrown open the window and tumbled over the sill, followed by a blast of cold night wind. Even though it was but half past five, the winter night had fallen. Sammy, who had wandered toward the great glowing tree as if hypnotized, gave a shriek of mingled terror and delight and turned to flee to the maternal refuge, but, bumping into "Mr. Camera" and a half dozen other gleeful children, he saw that retreat in that quarter was useless and, with a comical little plump to the floor, rolled under the bed like a rubber ball. His little face, quivering with excitement, was seen to peer from the folds of the Navajo blanket that had transformed the bed into a settle. Dougal

caught him to his shoulder, and the superior height gave him back his usual courage and self possession. Naya was as greatly surprised as the others. Not even her quick perceptions would have recognized Len had she not cast a quick eye around the room for the missing one.

He had been transformed into a magnificent Viking of old, his coat and cap of fur covered with ice and snow. The result of six feet padded with bunk house pillows and elevated on high-heeled boots (carefully concealed with fur arctics) was truly giant-like and imposing, and an immense pack on his back foretold his generous intentions.

Naya ran for See Yup.

In a colossal rumbling voice that made one think of icebergs and polar bears, he began calling his "dear Powder River children" by name, followed by the distribution of presents.

"My want to pool heems whishkas," Sammy announced, growing brave under the stress of excitement.

Santa Claus was about to top him with a soldier's cap, and dodged aside just in time to

save his reputation as well as his hoary adornment.

"Little friend from Poison Spider," said he tenderly, and the smarty newcomer was pushed forward by his grinning companions.

It was a newspaper print of an elk, which Len had suddenly thought of as he was in the act of arraying himself. His faithful shadow, Wiggy, had rushed to find it and, following Len's directions, had inscribed under it the one word, "Listen!"

"My want to pool heems whishkas," wailed Sammy, kicking Dougal's chest lustily and making dangerous snatches at the coveted prize.

Len was actually weak with heat, for the great pine knots roared and crackled in the fireplace. He rapidly distributed the rest of his pack of dolls, and trinkets, and flannel shirts, and smoking tobacco, and, speaking of the little children at Fort Russell who were expecting him, made for the window.

"My want to pool heems whishkas," shrieked Sammy, as the desire of his heart disappeared in the snow.

"Here, pull my hair." said Wiggy amiably.

He was always prophesying that old age and baldness would wrest from him his popularity with children.

"No," shrieked Sammy, who had been deprived of his afternoon nap and was beginning to show it, "it's wed. My want wite whishkas." His mother and Hannah bore him off to bed.

William had replaced the band of ermine and the red plume with a little wreath of fragrant cedar, whose dull blue berries made a quaint effect against Naya's black hair. At the last moment See Yup had slipped a Japanese kimona into Santa Claus' pack—an exquisite crape thing with a flight of little gray birds winging their way across a sunset sky. It was hard to say which was the more beautiful, the poetic idea or the marvelous embroidery. Naya had slipped it on over her white dress and, with her half-oriental face and crown of green, she became strangely lovely and aloof from her surroundings. She had never possessed but one finger ring, a heavy band of Navajo silver, inlaid with a crescent and stars of turquoise. She always wore it, and Hannah thought it both barbarous and unsuitable, so she had sent for a

circlet of pearls, and William had added a threadlike necklace of the same lustrous gem. The child sat by a little low tea table examining them—the table being Dougal's workmanship and gift—and on the floor at her feet were beautiful bridles, wonderfully woven from horsehair, braided rawhide quirts, buckskin bags full of flint arrowheads, pieces of rock bearing curious images of maple leaves and fish, perhaps found on the barren plains miles from water and trees, and every thing that the generous and adoring cow-puncher heart could devise.

The stable held Pigeon's rival, the little black Pehta,[1] with a spirit like the west wind and a heart as gentle as a dove. A few days since Len had brought him from the breaks of the Yellowstone, at the same time parting with several months' wages, as William decided in helpless distress. Naya was wild over his beauty, but, after Len was out of sight, she had sought out Pigeon and vowed her eternal fidelity.

William sat looking at her and was startled afresh by a certain indefinable something which gave him a glimpse of what her womanhood might be. There was a little dull ache at his

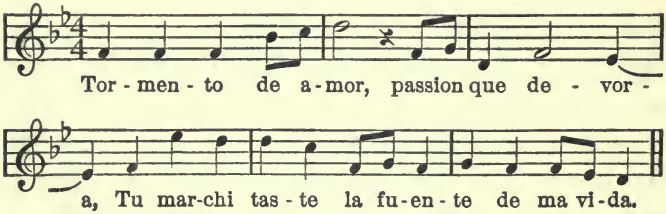
[1] War Eagle.

heart these days for, although the heavy winter snows and a most careful scouting of the country told him there was no immediate danger, yet the thought of spring filled him with dread.

But his brooding mood was not in accord with the Christmas gayety around him, he decided, and he roused himself just as Len came to cross two swords on the platform erected on one side of the room, and Dougal, in kilts, cap and dirk of the Scottish Highlander, entered to the sound of a bagpipe. The big Scotchman plunged into his sword dance with a grace and lightness of foot that would have done credit to a *première danseuse,* while the plaintive pastoral melody, breathing the fragrance of the pink-heathered Highlands, was now soft and dreamy, now wild and quick. Everyone became quite breathless and frozen-eyed as he watched the intricate, lightning steps, which never once touched the shining swords, but went on and on across and around them to the rhythm of the shrill melody, floating high above the harsh drone fifths. There was a sudden silence and Dougal stepped down as red as his kilts and "puffin' like a snow plow a boockin' drifts," as he said.

The next number on the program was a duet by Len and Wiggy, entitled, "Tumbleweed Pete's First Header," their brothers of the round-up swelling the chorus. This received vociferous applause, especially from the modest performers themselves, who, with great shows of shyness and reluctance next favored the assemblage with the elegant "Why the Tomato Can."

Pico alone seemed unappreciative. The little Spanish vaquero who had drifted to the far northern range, no one knew why nor how, was prevailed upon to bring his guitar from the bunk house, and to its tinkling accompaniment he breathed rather than sang the passionate "El Tormento de Amor."



"Say the meaning of the pretty soft words," said Naya, leaning toward him, her face elo-

quent of the deep emotion his flaming music had awakened in her. But Pico shook his head as he dreamily tuned the guitar.

"Ze luv is for ze song, not for ze speech," and, brushing his fingers over the strings in a poetic little prelude, he drifted into the sweet old Spanish song which once echoed among the magnolias and oleanders from California to old Mexico, "La Noce est Serena."

Naya was enchanted. He had recently been transferred from one of the other ranches, and she had never before heard him sing.

"Is it beautiful, the far country to the south? Do you sing of that?"

His homesick heart instantly forgot all but those lovely eyes and their sympathetic response to his music.

"*Si-si,* Senorita, it ees ver' lovely. It ees painted here," putting his hand on his heart, "ze leetle mission, ze padre—ze dooves, so white in ze blue sky—ze roses. Santa Maria, a long while it ees"—

"Did Shanty Claus shing? My want to pool heems whishkas," and Sammy stood in the doorway, rubbing his sleepy eyes.

"We *must* go home," said Mrs. Carver, and she began to collect her unwilling brood.

Wiggy ran to the stable for the big bays and the sled. The night was cold and clear, and the sky snapped and flashed with great falling stars.

"Gooda nighta," said Pico's soft voice and, bending with a gentle smile, he kissed the hand Naya held to him. "Zank you for ze *dona.* I will do myself ze honor to teach you ze leetle words one day. 'La Calandria'—I sang it not —ees also ver' *bella. Adios,* Senorita."

He kissed Hannah's hand also, much to that puritanical lady's surprise and vexation, but she forgave him for the sake of his lovely music and spoke some kind words as, with the grand air of a Spanish courtier, he bowed himself out.

"The curly headed, singin', greaser idiot," thought Len, with jealous wrath.

He would not presume to kiss even the sole of her little moccasin, and here this "dago" had had the impudence to actually kiss her hand. It was too much. Standing bareheaded in the snow he threw the little Carvers into the sled, half of them "changing ends" in the process.

They wildly clutched their dollies and bags of goodies, but fortunately there was a plentiful padding of clothing and hay, and they eventually turned right side up without sustaining any mishaps.

"It is only eight," Naya was begging of Hannah, as he entered the house, " 'Shanty Claus' and I want to play just *one* game."

Somewhat appeased, Len soon found himself opposite his cedar-crowned goddess with the new cribbage board between them.

"Hush," she said suddenly, stopping to listen.

The hungry wild things of plain and mountain were abroad in the silent night. The wierd wailing of coyotes was broken by the deep melancholy howl of a wolf, and far off in a different direction came the faint, almost human scream of a cougar.

William looked at Naya. She loved to hear them. The kimona's silken folds fell back from her uplifted hand, and her head was slightly turned in an attitude of listening. Instinctive dread mingled with delight shown in her eyes, and for a fleeting instant William saw in her the image of innocent youth hearing the first faint

footfall of destiny, the destiny that treads but once the deep inner pathway of a woman's soul, and either catches her up in rapture, or passes and leaves her to darkness and tears. It was but the idea of a mind whose firm texture was interwoven with the rich threads of instinctive art, but as they turned to their game, he dropped his book and his thoughts became more personal. He knew her's was a nature which would learn and develop, not through the advice and experience of others, but only through its own tragic upheavals. The bitterness of life for such as she consists not in its torturing inner conflicts, but in the empty world one finds, when, on rising, strengthened and enriched and worthy, the hands are full of ashes and Happiness sinks below the far horizon to return no more. Some almost forgotten words of La Bruyére's floated across his memory, *"La plupart des hommes emploient la première partie de leur vie à rendre l'autre misérable."*

His conscience made it quite clear to him that it was impossible to keep her in this wilderness many years longer, but could he push such a nature into the vortex of life unguarded?

The thought of leaving the grandeur and peace of his surroundings for the old life in England left him smothered; the rounds of dull country visits, the petty parish gossip, the absolute lack of bigness and freedom which had become so necessary to him. And then, the little plateau on the mountains, how leave that? It was here alone that God spoke to him, not in the glitter and tinsel and fog and filth of the great cities. Wyoming! Oh, the pale silver of her winter dawns, and the dull amber of her winter sunsets! How would it end?

CHAPTER X

When daisies pied and violets blue
And lady-smocks all silver white
And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue
Do paint the meadows with delight.
SHAKSPERE—*Love's Labour's Lost.*

When Naya rose, the moon was a great sphere of white fire hanging above the jagged crests of the Bighorns. The birds began calling in the thickets, and rifts of pearly light rippled the dusky clouds in the east. As the pearl melted to rose, and the rose flamed to crimson, the flowers stirred and whispered together in the fresh wind, for they too seemed to realize that a momentous day was approaching. It was a wild sweet dawn, and Naya's heart sang like a bird as she ran into the open. A skylark was streaming upward. She watched it breathlessly as it fluttered like a tiny leaf against the blue, its cascades of silver song, now richly passionate, now faintly sweet, showering the earth like the music of another world.

For months they had talked of nothing but this camping trip to the Bighorn Mountains. It had been promised for late June, but spring, as if moved by loving pity for their impatience, had come a month earlier than usual, sweeping the land like a warm tidal wave and weaving the hills with flowers until they appeared like fold on fold of gorgeous brocade.

The semiannual round-up had passed a few days since. After the calves had been branded and counted and the herds dispersed to the plains, William plunged into the preparations for their trip with as much glee as the children. Arthur had never been to the mountains, and he was fairly steeped in excited anticipations, while Naya, who held all outdoor life in the most passionate adoration, had been counting the days.

Unhappily for Hannah's hopes, the long looked for piano had been engulfed in a raging stream, a too close acquaintance with the whisky bottle having inspired the freighter to attempt a crossing. Therefore, aside from the usual amount of reading and study which William required of her daily, Naya had done nothing the whole spring but plan for this holiday. Dur-

ing their absence Hannah was going to visit some Eastern friends who had recently located in Cheyenne, but despite her happiness over the prospective renewal of old and dear relations, she became more and more restless as the time approached for their departure.

Len said he was actually becoming tatooed with admonitions such as, "Be sure she puts on her jersey when the sun goes down," "Don't let her fall in Smet Lake," Keep her away from poison oak," etc., etc., for he heard nothing else, was permitted to think of nothing else, and dreamed of nothing else. He inked the latter warning on his forearm and showed it to Hannah as a proof that mental derangement would soon assail him.

But it was her first separation from Naya since the child had come into her life to lighten the burden of memory and loneliness, and her heart ached with an apprehension that she herself could not understand. Wasn't her own father going with her? Could there be a greater and deeper assurance than that of his presence? He adored her—but then,—and her cheerful thoughts faltered, all men were careless at times.

He loved to hunt and would leave her—but of course there were Len and Arthur, and Dougal was to join them the following week.

After their hasty breakfast she was in the sitting room tying the flour sack that held Naya's little wardrobe. Suddenly she sent word to Len that she wanted to see him.

"Len Douglas, clow-plunchee, at your service. I suppose this time I am not to let an alligator swallow her."

She looked up with a smile of welcome as the young cow-puncher came in, but it did not altogether obliterate the anxiety in her eyes.

"I suppose I *am* foolish. Mr. Dunsmuir says he feels sure the Indians have given up their mad scheme to steal the child. They always move early in the spring and here it is almost summer. But some way, I can't rid myself of the idea. Her father will want to hunt and Arthur is perfectly crazy about it, so she will be left to you. *Do* be careful and never leave her alone."

Len's teasing manner left him, and his handsome brown face became grave and attentive.

"You just depend on me, Mrs. Warren, and

don't you worry a bit. Come out and see old Juniper. Of all the villainous old fools he's the worst, but he's sure a Jim-dandy in the mountains. Carries three times as big a pack as the other mules and, best of all, never falls down."

Whatever Juniper's good qualities might be, he certainly did not give the impression of a likely competitor in a beauty show. He had been named, so they say, for old Juniper Simpson, his former master, but by stretching the imagination somewhat, it was easy to trace a strange likeness, both in color and anatomy, to a gnarled and verdureless specimen of the tree designated. Fancy a great ugly mule, colossal in stature and with a head like a dromedary. Long jagged scars in his muscular flank proclaimed a stormy youth, probably a desperate conflict with a bear, while one empty eye socket glared eloquently of some other tooth and nail conflict. Just at present the remaining eye fastened itself coyly on the ground, as Dougal and William attached the pack saddle and began heaping him with the paraphernalia of camp life. His virtues, whatever they were, could not entirely destroy the memory of occa-

sional vicious tricks, and they were congratulating themselves upon his good behavior.

It must have given the little Peggy mule a queer sensation in the pit of her stomach as Old Tom led her past Juniper's humbly drooping head. The coy eye opened with a sudden vindictive glare, and he gave a lash of his great muscular tail, as if to say, "Won't I just kick the stuffin' out of you though, you little tasseled fool." *His* tail wasn't shaved. *He* didn't look like a little sissy in tasseled spring-heeled shoes. But of course the packers had no means of divining these inner reflections. As Dougal topped the cooking utensils with a great load of bedding, and William cast the rope for the diamond hitch, Juniper had a sudden thought. Perhaps Peggy's surrender to his charms and general superiority did not depend entirely upon the force and fleetness of kicks. Why not prove to her that if these worthy gentlemen were skillful in packing, he was equally skillful in *unpacking,* and by a reverse process could accomplish in two minutes what had taken them half an hour.

The rope tickled his flank. That was an

excellent excuse. His first lunge brought the bedding over on his tail and the ax handle touched his side. Heavens, what had they put on him? He had only jumped for fun, but this was frightful. Perhaps that well remembered grizzly whose skull he had finally crushed with his unerring heels, had suddenly come to life there on his tail. He forgot little Peggy and his amorous thoughts. He forgot everything except that awful live thing that must be disposed of, no matter what the cost. The chickens screamed and fled. Hannah made a snatch at Naya, but seeing that that little wild cat had already scaled the corral fence, did not stop until she was safe within the stable. Thump! Bang! Crash! Frying pans, tin plates, buckets and Dutch ovens spilled from the saddle bags with the upward impetus of skyrockets, and blankets enough to bed an army were fluttering and flapping and unfolding in the wind. In the beginning it was a little outburst of histrionic talent, but now the erstwhile comedian was deadly in earnest and in such a state of hysteria that he could not have stopped had he wanted to. He had torn the rope from William's hands and was fast ap-

proaching the little aspen thicket by the shop. The door was open, and perhaps thinking it was the stable, perhaps not noticing what he did, he dashed in there to find himself face to face with Arthur and Pico, who were hunting a missing pack rope. The onslaught of the raging one-eyed demon was so furious and unexpected, that they evaporated without pausing for preliminaries, one under the carpenter's bench and the other behind a pile of boxes. But there was no danger. The devil departed as suddenly as he came, and Juniper felt foolish. He fell to trembling violently and his one wild eye, now tame and apologetic, sought the ground. Pico led him out and, in a state of docility and humiliation, he allowed himself to be once more laden with the scattered pack.

"*Espiritu Santu!*" said Pico with an extravagant gesture, "In Andalusia, when I was ze leetle boy, I heard ver' oft' of ze terrible dragon of ze one eye. I zought he come!"

Poor Alder whinnied beseechingly from the little pasture opening into the horse corral. He presented a doleful appearance, for the day before his nose had been bitten by a rattlesnake

and it was now as big as a molasses keg. Arthur grieved to leave him, but the trip would be hard, and as a compensation he had been given Firefly, the somewhat excitable but swift-footed champion of all the Powder River meets. Naya was to ride Pigeon, and the beautiful Pehta, running about loose, was to follow the party, providing an extra mount in case of mishap. He had developed into the most extraordinary pet, shadowing Naya like Sahkee, the fawn. They, with Tweed, were romping about her now and suddenly Pehta slipped behind her and taking her arm very gently in his teeth, hung fast until Len drove him away.

When at last the little cavalcade started, Dougal had to hold tightly to the frantic dog, which they had decided to leave behind as ruinous to hunting, and the deer, having been coerced into the corral, made desperate attempts to leap the bars. Pehta alone had his liberty, and he circled around them joyously, his luxuriant mane and tail blowing in the wind. Hannah waved a cheery goodby, but her heart was heavy. Somehow they all felt strangely deserted

and alone as the camping party disappeared in the sunny hills.

William, mounted on big gray Rajah, rode at the head of the procession, while Naya and Arthur followed close at his heels. Then came Juniper, solemn as an owl and as well behaved as the traditional "dead Injun," and close behind him was the reliable Hattie, whose primness and precision of ways reminded one of an old maid school-marm. Little Peggy, with a coat like gray plush, brought up the rear. She would *not* keep the road but, inspired by youth and a whimsicality said to be characteristic of her sex, started across the plains at a brisk trot, pack bobbing wildly, as if she knew where to find more desirable company. Len, who had been delayed a moment, came dashing in pursuit, and finally coaxed the capricious female to a place between Juniper and Hattie. The former instantly lost his regained reputation by letting fly his heels, and the terrified lady deserted once more, only in another direction. At last she was installed behind the stiff and ladylike Miss Hattie and Len, on Comet, formed a rear guard.

He decided that he had managed badly, for he wanted to ride with Naya. However, he had to content himself with the view of her slim upright figure in its simple frock of brown homespun and the long purple-dark braids that fell low on either side. Her father had provided a light weight sombrero, but she carried it crushed under her arm. Now and again she turned to smile or wave the disdained hat at Len, as fragments of his song floated to her across the backs of the pack animals.

Her fourteenth birthday had passed. She was now in her fifteenth year. Len's song suddenly ceased and he closed his eyes. He had never thought of just *that,* and the splendid untamed blood of twenty-one leaped to his heart. But it was like dreaming of the great luminous star that had guided him over the Bighorns the night of his long ride. A thousand voices seemed to clamor in his ears, but his spirit lifted a stern hand and they were silenced. His momentary wrestle had carried him so far that when he opened his eyes the flower strewn hills seemed oddly remote and unreal.

What flowers! Deep rose-hued cacti with

a thousand fringelike petals, lovely frank-faced yellow ones like patches of sunshine, dashes of scarlet mallow and clusters of creamy petaled soap plant, while a profusion of starlike Mayflowers and lavender sweet peas veiled the prairies as far as one could see. The yellow-breasted meadow larks filled the air with the bubbling rapture of their song, and occasionally herds of fleet antelope brushed the tops of the flowers, only to disappear like spectres, one could hardly distinguish when or where.

They had their lunch at a tiny stream, margined with the vivid green of moisture-loving willows, and as the sun was setting, they came in sight of the exquisite Lake de Smet. It lay as tranquil as a sheet of glass, lustrous with the rich hues of the departing sun.

William turned to Naya with an expression of delight.

"Look, darling, it is like a great stained glass window in an old cathedral."

"It comes from the sky, the cathedral of the Great Spirit," said Naya musingly.

They watched it until it paled. Cloud Peak, whose crest of eternal snow towered beyond and

far above, was still mantled in splendor, but the shadows were deepening in cañon and forest as the party followed the trail leading to Big Piney. For the country had undergone a great change since the morning. Instead of the richly carpeted prairie, the home of the cactus and soap plant, delicate mountain flowers waved softly in the twilight forest, and the sudden flight of the crested blue jay flashed in the gloom of the pines.

Len preceded them, driving the pack animals before him and they followed at a rapid pace. He had already selected a camp site and, with skilled and practiced hands, was relieving the mules of their loads and hobbling the runaways.

During the supper preparations, Naya and Arthur, on an exploring expedition, crossed on a fallen log to a little island, its dusky shores wreathed with the singing waters of Big Piney. A sudden gleam came to them from the opposite bank and, holding hands and creeping closer, they peeked through the dense undergrowth. There by a great fire were two Indians. Arthur pulled Naya back.

"Quick," he said, "before they discover our camp. We must get out of here."

"No," she said, pulling away and laughing a little at his terrified manner, "they are Crows, a most nice race and now friendly to us, the Blackfeet. They know already that we are here. One fools never the Indian. See, they make gestures in our direction. I go to invite them to supper. You run and tell Len to cook *all* the antelope. They eat as the wolves, these nice Crows."

The flaming fire revealed an opening in the trees and, seeing a natural bridgeway of drift wood, she ran nimbly across it and into the light of the camp fire. Her impetuosity struck horror to Arthur's soul, for to him Indians were symbolic of scalping knives and massacre. Little tranquil Clifdale knew them not, in fact he had never seen one except in the faded reproductions which further the romance and dread of the "Leather Stocking Tales." His heart thumped wildly. He tried to catch her, to call her back, but his voice was lost in the roar of the baffled stream, as it leaped and dashed against the barricades of drift wood. There was nothing

to do but follow, for he would rather have died than abandoned her to those savages.

"How," she said gaily to a squatting redskin who was kindling a tiny cooking fire at a short distance from the main one.

He was a slender young buck with a quantity of thick black hair hanging about his copper-colored face, and when he rose it was with the lissomeness of a carelessly folded ribbon which one lifts by the end. He smiled amiably, showing a row of very white teeth.

"How, little lady. You come camp?" and he waved his hand toward their camping ground.

"Nothing of the sinister Magua here," thought Arthur, but despite the young Indian's frank and pleasant manner, his suspicions were unallayed.

"Yes," she smiled, "make you the hunt in this beautiful country?"

"Hunt?—No good hunt. Help old man. He hunt. No hunt deer—no hunt elk—hunt rocks," and an expression of disgust momentarily blotted the good nature from his features. "You hunt?"

"No," she said, "not I, but my cousin, per-

haps. This is my cousin, Arthur Dunsmuir, from over the great waters."

The Indians eyed Arthur curiously, for by this time the other had joined them. He was rather older than the first, being a heavy-set fellow with a hideously pock-marked face, somewhat softened by pleasant eyes. Evidently his English was more scanty than that of the first, for his conversational endeavors consisted of an occasional unintelligible grunt.

"We stay quite three weeks in the mountains. We come to-day from the ranch of my father on Powder River." And she went on with the frankness that sometimes terrified William. "I most sorry that I know not the speech of my brother the Crow. I speak the Blackfoot. My mother was Crystal Stone, the daughter of Eagle Ribs. Once the Crows and Blackfeet were enemies, but now the feather of the white swan is between them. I ask you to have supper at my camp."

Arthur could have groaned. He thought the Indians exchanged a queer glance. There was no sympathy between him and this strange racial instinct that prompted such headlong friend-

liness and hospitality. By the light of the leaping fire, the mischievous young Crow noticed the distrust and anxiety in the boy's blue eyes, and put one hand carelessly inside his buckskin shirt, from which Arthur expected him to draw a knife at any instant.

"Good evening, my dear young friends. I wish to ask you a few questions."

The children turned with a start, and there behind them was a little old man in a long gray ulster. An old fashioned muffler was knotted around his neck, and a warm black cap protected his head from the night chill. They had not seen him before, for he came from the opposite side of the great camp fire, and had been concealed by smoke and flames. Evidently he had been reading in its light, for one withered hand retained a place in his book.

"I have come to this interesting region in the name of science, my dear young friends. Yonder peak," and he waved his hand vaguely, "is of feldspathic granite, syenite, and gneiss, while not far distant from the very ground we stand upon are rocks of Silurian and Triassic. But I search especially the valued remains of the

Brontotherium of the Miocene age. Have you happened to see any of those precious relics in your wanderings?"

Naya gulped. Why hadn't she studied her English harder, then maybe she would know what he was talking about. She cast a rapid glance at Arthur, but he was dumb. Then her bewildered gaze rested on the lithe young Crow, who stood a little behind his patron and charge. He tapped significantly on his forehead and, with sudden thought, began explaining in the sign language, so well known to most of the aboriginal tribes of America. Naya knew enough to comprehend the gist of his meaning.

"Harmless old man. He hunts bones and rocks. We are his guides."

"I know so little of the English," she said sweetly, turning to him, "but I am sure that father knows what you ask. He knows very much. I ask you and your guides to supper."

"Wah-hoo," came echoing through the forest from Len's lusty lungs.

"Come on," she said, "it is ready."

The old man followed her docilely, and the young Crow helped him over the drift wood

with a care that was almost filial. Arthur kept directly behind Naya. He expected a knife in his back, but he meant to shield her, whatever the cost. Why had she done this? He thought that he understood his little Wyoming cousin less and less. The whole thing was perfectly astounding. Most girls would have rushed back to camp and let their elders attend to the amenities of chance acquaintanceship, but here she had approached these strangers without any preliminaries and, with the air and composure of a princess, had invited the whole camp to supper. The amazement of William and Len may well be imagined when she appeared with her retinue of two Crow Indians and a little old man in grotesque spectacles.

"The little minx," said William, laughing softly to himself as he untied some antelope hams from the branch of a nearby tree. Len had caught a few trout in Clear Fork early in the afternoon, which he had prepared for their supper, but these, although in moderate abundance, were plainly insufficient for so large a party. However, with the help of the two friendly

Indians, a bountiful repast was soon served for all.

The old man was installed on a blanket near the fire, for the nights were still very cold, and Naya brought him a little flat stone for his cup.

"May I ask if that strange conchitic appendage of your offspring is real?" he asked of William, who sat near him, holding his tin plate on his knee.

At Naya's look of horror his face became boyish with fun.

"It may look artificial, but it is really the work of nature," he responded, patting her cheek and purposely choosing an answer that would mystify her still further.

"Does he mean my teeth?" she whispered, crowding closer to him and instinctively covering her mouth with one hand. "Does he think them not real?"

But her father pretended not to hear.

As if forgetting what had momentarily interested him, the rambling thoughts of the unsound mind wandered into another channel.

"Yes, they say the Spaniards came very far

north," assented William, as he put a trout on his strange guest's plate.

"Ze dear Pico, for instance," said Len in an undertone as Arthur passed the cup they were forced to share between them.

"It is certain, my dear friend. Washington Irving, in his estimable volume entitled 'Astoria' has said, 'The Spaniards changed the whole character and habits of the Indian when they brought the horse among them.' An indelible assurance is imprinted upon my mentality."

The fanatic had some one to listen to him, and his voice became tense and eager.

"There are manifold proofs. The journal of the valorous Lewis and Clark states that the horses of the aborigines were caparisoned with accouterments of Hispanic design. In 1865 ruins of ancient stone dwellings were found in this very region. It is here in these dark mountainous defiles that I seek the remains of Don Juan de Onate's famous exploration and his cities of fabulous wealth and splendor. The legends come to us from the friars of the holy Saint Francis of Assisi. But," and here his thoughts strayed again, "of all extinct mammalia

I find the laelaps the most interesting. They weighed many tons, had teeth like swords, and the brontosaur—"

"Hoo-hoo," came from an ironic old owl way off in the pines, and Arthur, whose fear had somewhat abated, jumped up and began hopping around the fire on one foot, saying the other had gone to sleep. But his actions were a little suspicious, for a foot asleep is not the funniest sensation in the world, as his mirth seemed to testify.

The old gentleman stuck to William like a plaster. If the latter went to the creek for a drink, there he was at his elbow, with his confused harangue of dry facts and visionary fancies. It would have been ludicrous had it not been so pitiful. But the mischievous Crow was delighted, and when his patron instructed that their camp be moved next to that of his new friend, the gleeful Rushing Wind (for by this time Naya had learned not only his name but his whole family history) went off through the trees performing a series of crazy antics that made even the dismayed William laugh.

Naya's bed was under a great pine near the

creek, with a lacework of shrubs screening it from the fire. The springy branches of the young fir formed a mattress, and on these Len had arranged the blankets and little pillow.

A suggestion from her father sent her early to bed, but she complied with great reluctance, for it was still a mystery whether he had meant her teeth or her hair. Maybe it was her nose! Fearful thought! Her father's bed was close to her own, and she meant to stay awake until he came, but soon the murmer of the stream grew dreamy and far away, and the night wind, laden with the odor of balsam and the perfumes of spring, touched her cheek with soothing fingers, and she slept.

She was awakened about five minutes afterwards, she thought, by a great crackling, and there was Len bending over the fire with the coffee pot in his hand, and the day had begun. Her father was still asleep. His fine face, grave and quiet as a mask, was clearly discernible in the gray dawn, and his great chest rose and fell at regular intervals. Leaning on one elbow, she reached over and lightly touched his cheek

with a little forefinger. He wakened with a start, then his face melted in a sleepy smile.

"You little torment! What do you think, that bone hunter didn't let me come to bed until almost three o'clock! I burned all the wood within a radius of half a mile, and when I finally convinced him that he needed rest for the sake of science, I was honestly so sleepy that I reached up to my head to take off my boots."

Then with that *bonne camaraderie* which made him the most irresistibly charming of fathers, he turned on his side to better see her and gave her a graphic account of his midnight grapple with the insistent old man.

"It's all your fault," he ended, "and I'm going to tell him that you are a Dinoceras in disguise, so that he will follow and torment you all the rest of your days."

To their unspeakable relief and the chagrin of the sociable Indians, Len decoyed him to another trail, describing some really curious formations in the direction advised, so after breakfast the strange little party said goodby.

"My dear young men," he said to Arthur and Len as Rushing Wind, crestfallen but still good-

natured, came leading his patron's stout brown nag, "I hope you will both be paleontologists, and thus become noble aids in the illumination of the modern world."

"Golly! What kind of a beast is that?" said Arthur in Len's ear, as the departing guest turned to William.

He assured him of his hope to resume at no late date the inspiring conversation of the night before, for after examining the interesting deposits which the young man had described, he would return and overtake them.

"Speakin' of hittin' the trail," said Len, flying around with the breakfast things, "we won't stop till we've reached the Tetons."

CHAPTER XI

Souls made of fire, and children of the sun,
With whom revenge is virtue.

YOUNG—*The Revenge.*

Five days had passed since they left the camp on Big Piney, during which they had wandered ever farther and deeper into the wilderness. The third morning William and Naya had left the others, agreeing to meet them at a stated rendezvous the evening of the second day.

They found the little sun-suffused plateau with its shrine of granite, still encrusted with snow, but the green margin edging the drifts was sprinkled with flowers, so tiny and white that they resembled bewitched snowflakes. Wreaths of blue forget-me-nots danced blithely in the cold upland winds, their slender stems and fair faces an exquisite tracery on the snows they bordered. To defeat the wind's sweeping purpose, the branches of the wild rose and syringa, which they brought from below, were pinioned with rocks, but it stripped the delicate pink and

white petals with merciless glee and filled the air as with snow eddies flushed with dawn.

"Come, darling," said William, wrapping Naya's cloak closer about her.

He always restrained his grief in her presence, and his manner was as quiet as usual. Heretofore their visits to the sacred spot had filled her heart only with joy and tenderness. She had never seemed to realize that her mother was dead, and each year this pilgrimage in the "Moon of Flowers" was like a mystic hand leading her farther and farther into a world of dream thoughts and spirits. But to-day her heart was heavy.

"No, no, father! Not yet. Perhaps we come not again," and, assailed by a strange presentiment, she dropped to the ground sobbing piteously.

He knelt so as to shelter her from the stinging wind and, although her outburst had shaken the fortress of his own grief, he steadied his trembling voice and talked to her as only a father can talk to the child he loves and understands.

The following day they had joined the others. Not even to William did she allude to their

visit and the unaccountable wave of foreboding that had swept over her, but mingled with the returning gayety, which danced in her like a laughing mountain stream, were moods of tender melancholy that fell like the shadowy twilight when it purples the hills.

On account of the earliness of the season, they had confined themselves to the streams that divide the lower abutments of the mountains, but Naya was eager to show Arthur the view from the summit, so, despite William's prediction of cold and storm, they were shifting camp. The two hunters had left early in the morning, promising to meet Len and Naya in the afternoon on the banks of a lake lying a few miles higher in the timber. It was a beautiful sunny day, and the camp tenders, with their string of pack animals, wended their way slowly through the twisting glades, in whose depths trailed murmuring waters, like streams of diaphanous light.

"It is the singing month. Hush to the birds," said Naya.

Len had been unusually silent these many days, and he did not answer now, nor did he listen to the birds; but, as he turned to look at her, his

hazel eyes became more clearly brown, until they glowed with the rich depth one sometimes sees in a topaz. Then he turned away.

"No!" he said to himself, "no! no!"

These were days of struggle for the young cowpuncher. He had never analyzed his feeling for the child. It was a worship charged with "transcendent wonder," and mingled with the aspirations evoked by a lovely flower or a sublime sunset. But that meteorlike thought which had flashed across the clear spaces of his unconsciousness the morning of their departure had changed his whole inner life. At first he had been so repelled by what he considered his disloyalty to Mr. Dunsmuir that he had turned from it again and again with unchangeable rigidity of purpose. However, as the days passed, it haunted him more and more insistently, until with a blaze of anger, he wheeled to face and fight it.

"In the first place you are unworthy," he cried, shaking this first decisive weapon at his foe. But Len had self-respect. He had been no angel, and he knew it; but ever since his uncle had taken him from the orphan asylum and

brought him West nine years ago, only to die soon after, leaving him a prey to frontier vice, he had fought the battle of life bravely and honestly, and alone. He recoiled from the word "unworthy" and substituted "unfit." "But if you are worthy, how can you be unfit?" answered the voice, trembling with love and hope. Len ignored this feint. "Why she's nothin' but a little child," continued the scrupulous conscience, "just like one o' them little harebells bobbin' on the slope yonder." "She's goin' on fifteen. In four or five years perhaps— You know where there are mighty fine coal veins; why don't you homestead. Why, you could be rich in five years, and as for learnin', you know things that are far more useful and more beautiful than anything found in books." This fusillade of arguments silenced him, and he grasped the saddle horn with all his might.

"Oh! Oh!" cried Naya, "see Peggy!"

That frivolous lady was certainly in a terrible fix. It was a wonder that she had not broken her little gray plush neck, but sundry squeals of fright and the vigorous movements of four dainty hoofs gave evidence that, once righted,

they would scamper about as whimsically as ever. She lay prone on her back some thirty feet below the trail, whither she had just journeyed by a series of indecorous somersaults. Fortunately the arm of a gaunt pine had caught her in its embrace and her end over end course suddenly terminated on the brink of a precipice. It was a good deal her fault to be sure, for, becoming bored with the staleness of existence, she had thrown caution and courtesy to the winds and, despite the narrowness of the trail, tried to push past Miss Hattie.

Now for a long time the pretty Peggy's giddy manner had been absolutely unbearable to that somewhat acrimonious spinster, and she harbored bitter memories of former slights and self-assertions. This was too much. A quick crowd, and poor Peggy was launched on the wild career just described. Hattie was filled with snappish satisfaction until she saw the unladylike attitude of her victim, when she turned her head the other way, horror and indignation consuming her. Better to have broken her silly neck than be guilty of such misdemeanor. Juniper's genius as a mountaineer was retrieving his

damaged reputation but, although he tryanized over his mischievous inamorata, it was doubtless to conceal an unmanly tenderness of heart. His one eye, now softened in deep distress and anxiety, rolled in her direction, while he intoned a lament fit to split the vaults of heaven. Len rapidly loosened the pack and the pretty creature struggled to her feet. One would expect humility after such a downfall, but the menaces of fate had no dampening effect on this merry spirit. A few agile bounds and she had regained the trail, however not for a serious purpose it seemed, for, frisking ahead of the train and around the bend, she disappeared in the twinkling of an eye. Len, who had grown to hate her almost as much as the prim Miss Hattie, started in pursuit and soon returned with the runaway at the end of his rope.

Naya had slipped from her saddle and was gathering a bouquet of quaint grasses and harebells.

"How more far to the lake?" she asked.

"Just a quarter of a mile over the ridge," he said, tightening the cinch of the pack saddle

until Peggy wrathfully nipped his arm. "Are you gettin' tired?"

" 'Gwacious, no,' as baby Carver says, but I am most hungry."

From the crest of the ridge they could see the tiny lake, lying like an exquisite sapphire in its encircling fringe of rushes and water lilies. The slopes surrounding it were not as densely timbered as the cañons they had just left, but here and there, adorning the stretches of verdant meadow, were groups of hemlock and spruce, arranged with such an art and precision of touch that one half expected to see an ancient castle rising in the midst of this princely domain. A noble elk crashed through the copse close by, his great antlered head proudly erect; and an eagle, bearing a wee spotted fawn in its talons, slowly flapped its way toward the frowning cliffs at the end of the lake. Exuberant flowers of countless hues seemed to stretch themselves in the sun, as if making the most of their short lives in this high altitude.

"Yes," said Len in response to Naya's exclamations of delight, "as some fellow has said, 'There are eight months of winter and four of late

in the fall' up in these high mountains. They are makin' the most of life while it lasts. That's the way people should do."

"We will," said Naya gaily. "We will make a so little cabin here on the lake and we will all live here forever!"

"Would you really like to live here forever—in this country, I mean, and not go to England to your father's people?"

They were crossing the sunlit meadow now and driving the pack mules before them.

"It is most curious," she returned thoughtfully. "It makes me happy to see the new things and the new people, but when I think of going across the great waters to English grandmother, it is as when I enter a house with no air. You understand? The windows not open for months and months. It is so with England. It opens never its windows."

Len laughed and raced after the pestiferous Peggy.

They pitched camp under some great trees which would afford protection in case of storm. One massive fir excited their particular admiration. The tips of its branches, drooping to the

ground, had caught root here and there, not unlike the banyan of India, thus forming a series of little arched apartments, softly illumined by the sun.

The others were not expected for an hour or more and, as it was quite noon, they flew to their dinner preparations. While Len made the fire Naya ran to gather some water lilies. A few feet from their camp site was a flat granite ledge, projecting in the water. Peering over its edge she saw such a lovely sight that in mute enchantment, she cast herself face downward on the rock and beckoned to Len.

"The water is like air for clearness," she whispered, "and the water swallows are most wonderful. You must see them."

A shoal of beautiful speckled trout was swirling and drifting in the deep water, in whose crystalline clearness their brilliant sides scintillated like flame. Len was a keen fisherman, and in a few minutes he had caught enough for dinner.

The meal was almost ready when the call of the hunters came echoing over the hills. Sensible old Rajah bore the pelt of a cinnamon bear. As

both Arthur and William had shot at it, both claimed it, and they had a laughing wrangle as to who was the rightful owner. It was the most beautiful camp they had had, and they were all famished and in the brightest spirits.

"There is a Crow tradition that when a warrior falls in battle he has but one step from here to the Happy Hunting Grounds. It seems to me that we are already there," said William, casting a look of content at the splendor of their surroundings, as he threw himself on the ground by the square of white oilcloth that served as a table. The shining plates rested on dark green lily pads, and the dazzling white blossoms, scattered among the dishes, filled the air with their fragrance. The array of food would certainly have shocked any self-respecting pantry shelf with its rows of pumpkin pies and doughnuts, Dutch oven bread, the shade of a pale brown autumn leaf, fried trout, and slices of crisp bacon, grouse stew with rice and dumplings, and a wonderful pudding stuffed with dried fruit. Len was evidently as adept in wielding the cooking spoon as the lasso of the round-up, but, as always, he belittled his own

efforts, no matter what their direction, and when pudding time came it was introduced by the following original lines, sung to the tune of "My Country 'T is of Thee:"

Dried prunes it is at thee
I hurl a frantic plea—
    You 'd better git.
Don't dare to show your face,
I 'll kick you off the place;
Lasting is your disgrace,
    The trail you 'll hit.

Arthur was in a hilarious mood, induced by the conquest of the cinnamon bear, and the foolish doggerel filled him with glee.

"Write out the rest of 'em, Len, and I'll sing too. I know there are ten thousand more."

So Len fished out a stubby pencil and soon the national hymn was transformed to the "Ode to Camping Out."

Hard bacon rinds and tea,
I'm pretty sick of thee
    And bayo beans too;
I want a beefsteak bone,
My pillow is a stone,
My fate I loud bemoan,
    With this I 'm through.

A STORY OF THE BIGHORN COUNTRY

It 's rainin' like the deuce,
By Gum! my back 's a sluice,
The bed 's a lake.
The wood is soakin' wet,
A fire I cannot get,
Right here I 'll have to set
Till plumb daybreak.

A worm crawls on my neck,
I guess I 'll be a wreck,
You need n't smile.
Great Scott! a rattlesnake,
What wonder that I quake;
My thirst I 'd like to slake,
I 've run a mile.

A cinder 's in my eye,
The wind is fierce. Oh, my,
The smoke is bad.
It tags me everywhere
I dodge it like a hare,
Blacker grows my despair,
I 'm goin' mad.

The pancakes are burnt up,
My pipe and coffee cup
I 've lost outright.
There ain't a thing to eat,
No whisky for a treat,
This thing 's got me plum beat,
I 'll die to-night.

NAYA

Yes, sir, oh, darn my luck,
A great big rock I struck,
And then the ground.
Oh, say, there was a crash,
My bottle went to smash,
The whisky all did splash
For miles around.

Buck fever 's just a curse,
I'd sooner drive a hearse,
What ails my knees?
A quakin' asp am I,
If bear I chance to spy;
Just hear that cougar's cry
Off in the trees.

Blast me, ain't it odd
I 'd 's soon be under sod—
You need n't roar.
It 's queer, but I 'll be cussed,
I guess my heart would bust,
I 'd mildew plumb and rust,
To come no more.

I love the fair blue sky;
When on the ground I lie,
It seems so near.
I love the singin' stream,
The lovely moon's bright beam,
When trees and flowers dream,
Oh life, so dear!

"Shucks," said Len, "I thought we were goin' up to the summit before dark."

He ran for the horses, while Naya and Arthur washed the dishes. William lay on his back, smoking and listening to the chatter of the children.

"It doesn't look more than half a mile," said Arthur.

"It is many I think," replied Naya, looking at the wide band of timber and the mighty bulwarks of granite which surmounted it.

And her prophecy proved true. The trail led no farther than the lake, so they had to break one for themselves, following the knife-like ridges and plunging through the deep cañons many of them still lined with strips of snow, until they were confronted with such precipitous masses of rock that they were compelled to abandon their horses. The day was drawing to a close, and the mountain winds lashed them with sudden icy fury.

"It is a whole month too early for an escapade of this sort," said William, a little vexed with himself for having yielded against his better judgment. "I'm suspicious of these early springs.

Be careful there, darling, catch hold of that bush."

He had gone a little ahead of the others to reconnoiter. He need not have been anxious for her safety, for Len was close behind and watched every step she made.

"Shades of Mrs. Warren, tie this over your head," he said, drawing a red silk handkerchief from his pocket.

They paused for a moment on one of the narrow ledges which gave them foothold on the granite wall. Naya peered over the edge with as little dizziness and fear as a bird and then looked up at the ragged crags above, their mantles of ice and snow beginning to glisten in a sunset they could not see.

"They look so stern," she remarked, "quite as if they have no pleasure that we would see the beautiful things they guard."

William smiled at her, for her quick fancy was his delight.

A few more scrambles and they were at the top. The magnificence of the spectacle shook even Arthur's prosaic soul. In the far west masses of inky clouds warred with the departing

sun, which rent them asunder with a thousand flashing bayonets of blood red and gorgeous gold, while chain after chain of snowy mountains trembled dimly in the distance, like troops of vestal virgins chanting their evening prayer to the wrathful heavens. The Powder, Tongue and Bighorn rivers with their multitudinous water courses, could be traced northward until they disappeared in the breaks of the Yellowstone, covering the land with a tracery that sparkled like a tangled skein of silver threads. Stretches of plain, like vast inland seas, seemed to rock at the bases of the mighty mountains, folding deep in their silent bosoms the tragedy of the earth's birth and the legends of ancient peoples long since claimed by the Mystery that gives but to take again.

> "Like leaves on trees the race of man is found—
> Now green in youth, now withering in the ground:
> Another race the following spring supplies."

Naya turned to her father with an expression of terror in her dark eyes.

"The sun has fallen to a sea of fire, and the mountains are ghosts fleeing from the so terrible storm."

Her dramatic imagination was all aflame, and her observations filled William with wonder.

A double rainbow encircled some distant hills like a brilliant sash, and a misty wall of rain glanced far on the Bighorn plain.

"It comes not here," said Naya. "The Great Spirit ties the rain demons with the rainbow, and, see, there are two, enough to tie them all." Then presently, "It is the skirt of the beautiful rain goddess. We can see not her face and hair, they are high in the clouds and all dripping with rain drops. And the river! She has dropped her necklace. It is like the string of crystals in the fairy book."

William had drawn her to the shelter of a boulder, but the cold rapidly increased and they reluctantly began their descent.

"Where are the boys? Oh, here you are. Where did you find them?"

Len had a handful of white shells, which bore eloquent testimony of the transformations and the former strifes of nature.

"Just think," said the cow-puncher, "if we had been here a million years ago, we would probably have been queer water creatures,

clingin' to these rocks in the middle of a sea. Mighty strange, all right. It certainly sets a man a thinkin'."

"Len, you are quite like the big-word man on Piney. Pretty soon we will know no more what you talk about," and Naya laughed mischievously over her father's shoulder as he lifted her down a steep place.

Len looked a little chagrined. He loathed the terrific words and pompous paraphernalia that shackle erudition, but he delighted in fathoming the simpler secrets of nature. He knew where the birds nested and could imitate their cries, and where the sea-green eyed coyote chose his lair, and where to find the prettiest flowers and autumn leaves.

"If ever I get skewed like that fellow," he said, "I'll just pass in my checks."

Soon after they mounted their horses they passed a deer lick, trodden with fresh tracks. Arthur's year of frontier life had taught him, among many other things not in the curriculum of Clifdale schools, that deer very often cluster about the licks at nightfall, and he begged to conceal himself for fifteen minutes and try

his luck. His prudence and excellent judgment had won the confidence of his elders and, readily assenting, William helped him choose a blind in some dense alders.

"But only a few minutes, you know, for the sun will soon be down. Follow this ridge and cross the cañon to the left."

"Yes, I know; I will catch you at the end of the first mile," said Arthur eagerly, wishing they would hasten.

But he failed to overtake them, and by the time they reached camp dark clouds were scudding across the sky, followed by gusts of cold wind and rain.

"I wish that boy would hurry," said William, a little anxiously. "He is a sensible little devil and as true as a compass in his sense of direction, but perhaps I should not have permitted him to stay behind. My, what a ranchman he is going to make!"

They had hoisted a little canvas tent under one of the trees, and he and Len were surrounding it with a trench, for the rain was rapidly increasing.

"I guess the Great Spirit forgot to tie a double

knot with the rainbows. The rain demons are broke loose," said Naya.

She sat in the opening of the tent, dreamily watching the camp fire as it leaped and sputtered in the storm. There was a stir in the bunch of horses and, with one accord, they came trotting close to camp, as if entreating human companionship and sympathy.

"I wonder what scared 'em," said Len, "just the wind, probably."

It was quite dark now. There came the faint report of a rifle.

"Arthur!" said William. "He must be lost. It is too dark to shoot at anything."

He fired an answering shot, hoping it would serve as a guide. Evidently it was audible to the boy, but the echoes had deceived him, for his second shot was fainter than the first.

"The compass has snapped his needle. He's goin' in the opposite direction. I'll just give Comet a little exercise," and Len took up his bridle.

"No! No!" said William, "I'll go. Rajah's right here and I know these mountains like the palm of my hand."

Divining he would feel easier to go himself, Len made no argument, but hastily threw on the saddle, while William hunted his whisky flask.

"He will be wet through," he said, and in another moment he was gone.

They soon heard a shot, but from its nearness, recognized it as William's signal. They listened intently. There was no answer.

"Poor youngster," said Len, "he hung around the deer lick too long, and he can't even see his horse's head. Whew! That'll give 'em a little light."

There was a wild play of lightning about the peaks above, giving them a glimpse of radiant lake and forest; then all was plunged in blackness. This was followed by a terrific crash of thunder and a fresh downpour of rain, which beat dully on the heavily branched trees and poured into the lake like a cloud-burst. Len wrapped a blanket close about Naya and, after stimulating the drenched fire, took a seat close by her in the tent.

"Are you afraid?" he asked.

"Oh, no," she replied. "The Great Spirit speaks to us by the storm. He says, 'I am

mighty.' Do you not hear? I am full of sorrow that they are in the rain, but I have no fear for them. Lennie," she continued, warming his heart with her sweet diminutive, "I know a secret. Shall I say it to you?"

Len nodded.

She drew from around her neck a bundle of magpie feathers, tied with some of her hair.

"It is my new medicine," she whispered, her eyes dilating with superstitious awe. "I had a dream. A magpie flew over my bed when I was sleeping and did brush my face with his wing, so that I awoke. Then he turned and looked at me with most strange eyes, saying, 'My tail is enchanted. To-morrow I die. Bury the feathers one at the time, and a magic circle will be about you and the people you love. The Evil Spirit can pass it not.' And the very next day Arthur shot a magpie, the same one, I know, for it had most strange eyes, and I did save its tail and I do bury the feathers, one at the time. That is why Peggy broke not her neck, and why we did escape the big-word man," and the bewitching little sorceress concealed her treasures

under her dress and hugged her knees in content.

Len felt like a little boy listening to a fairy story. He was about to speak, but there was a frightful glare and a bolt of lightning crashed into the forest on the opposite side of the lake, taking a great pine with it. Naya patted her "medicine" and never flinched. Len leaped to his feet.

"I think I'll just take a look at the horses. I won't be gone but a minute."

He came back presently, saying in utter disgust, "They've stampeded entirely. It's that little gray Peggy mule, I know. She's a perfect racer even with the hobbles on, and she's tried to start the bunch for the ranch a dozen times. It's goin' to clear up, the moon's right there on the edge of that cloud now, and I guess I'll take a little turn down the trail. If they ever get well started, they'll head straight for Powder. You're quite safe, for there ain't a soul within twenty-five miles, and the beasts won't come near a fire." He heaped on more wood and, catching up a rope, hastened off down the shore of the lake.

"Just a few minutes," he called reassuringly, casting a backward glance at the camp.

The rain suddenly ceased, following the thunder clouds that roared and rumbled down the mountain side, and a magic burst of moonlight stenciled the straight black pines against the sheen of sky and water. It never occurred to Naya to be afraid. She was too thoroughly a child of the wilderness. She thought a cup of tea might be welcome to the wayfarers and raked some fiery embers for the teapot. Then she began toasting some bits of venison on the forked willow wand Len had cut for her, pausing now and then to gaze at the fairy lake and dazzle of water lilies, which filled the air with their rain-drenched fragrance. The forest, darkly mysterious and aloof, lay wrapped in somber dreams. A night hawk suddenly flew over head, tearing the silken silence with its harsh, uncanny cry, and from the far distance came the mournful note of a wolverine.

Naya felt that some one was behind her and turned swiftly. It was White Buffalo, the Blackfoot chief. For one instant she was like a startled young doe of the forest, with head thrown

back and eyes frantic with fear. Then the self-control, inherited from generations of Indian ancestors, came to her assistance and mantled her face with an impenetrable stoicism.

The tall, blanketed figure of the chief was somewhat in the shadow, but occasional gleams of firelight cast in relief the bold-featured face, with its tyrannous eyes.

"Come, Nayatohta," he said in a deep voice not lacking in kindness.

The Indian holds his kindred in deep regard, and the chief's eyes were full of pride as he noticed her show of regal indifference.

"Wun-nes-tou is a fool if he thinks Nayatohta goes to live with the Indian," she responded coldly.

Oh, Len, dear Len, why didn't he hurry? The pounding of her heart was frightful, and she was glad that Arthur's coat sleeves covered her trembling hands.

White Buffalo took a threatening step.

"Be quick," he said angrily, "thou art a Blackfoot. Thy place is not with thy thieving white father."

Before he could prevent, she snatched a blaz-

ing knot from the fire, and with eyes as fierce as his, hurled it at him with all her might. He dodged and caught her by the wrists.

"Stars-on-the-River should be called the Wild-Cat-Who-Throws-Fire."

She saw that resistance was useless and instantly became as stoical as before.

"I will go," she said briefly, and he loosened his hold. "I may go to the *moeese* for my clothes?"

He nodded, and tearing off the tarpaulin that covered the commissary department, gorged like a wolf. All that he had no time to eat he swept into a fold of his blanket.

Naya found William's portfolio on his bed and, feeling for the pencil, wrote haphazard in the dark, "Gone with W," then she fell to kissing his pillow, trying to smother her sobs.

"Quick," said the Indian harshly, lifting the flap.

She took her flour sack and followed in silence. A shout from the end of the meadow told her that Len was returning. With a wild leap of hope she would have answered, but the Indian covered her mouth with one hand and with the

other dragged her noiselessly through the fern brake back of the tent and into a dense clump of firs, where Iron Horn held the horses.

Then they mounted and headed northward.

CHAPTER XII

That, in tracing the shade, I shall find out the sun.
Trust to me!

LYTTON—*Lucile.*

Len was returning without the horses. He had not found them at the head of the cañon as he had hoped to do and, although he felt that a half hour's run down the trail would enable him to catch them, he remembered that Naya was alone and decided to wait until daybreak before pursuing them farther. The meadow grass, often waist deep, was dripping with rain, and a dip in the lake could not have left him more thoroughly soaked. But the varied discomforts of outdoor existence, so diabolic to the tenderfoot, are merely incidental and unworthy of notice to the man of the lasso and the range. He hummed a little tune and peered toward the camp fire, a gleam of yellow flame in the greenish silver of the moonlight. It was intensely cold. He must heat a piece of granite for her

bed. Magpie feathers! Enchanted tail! He could not help laughing a little.

What a strange thing is inheritance! One constantly forgot Naya was an Indian, then suddenly, like a stream flowing underground, the mysticism and fiery soul of her ancestors burst to the surface, and one saw, as in a vision, generation after generation of the ancient race under the shadow of an invincible fate, marching silently toward the setting sun which for them would rise no more.

Len's thoughts drifted. That queer old trapper he had run across one fall over on a fork of the Popo-agie had told him that the Indians are the Lost Tribes of Israel. Perhaps! Poor persecuted race; like the buffalo, it is doomed to extinction. Len was not sentimental about the Indian, but he knew there were two distinct sides to the question, and he was moved to pity when he thought of them. It was all right to glorify the army for its wonderful heroism and tenacity in wresting these last superb hunting grounds from their savage tenants; the memories of its bitter sacrifices and brilliant victories will live forever in the heart of America. But what

of the hated, strangled race whose subjugation alone made these triumphs possible?

The young cow-puncher's mind was unfolding. It was like a splendid young oak which, shackled and restrained by its surroundings, suddenly feels a giant vitality in its mighty limbs and, with the impetus of latent power, bursts into branch and leaf and the beauty which was God's intention. Sometimes there came such a feeling of deep inner mastery and expansion that he could have shouted for joy. In those moments he felt as if he could juggle the Bighorn Mountains in one hand and whirl the Powder River like a ribbon in the other; as if no heroism, no mental task nor moral obligation could be a sufficient test of his colossal strength. His mind tackled anything and everything that came beneath its notice with a force and thoroughness that were surprising. The absurd and faulty policy of the nation toward that first American, the Indian, was etched on his brain in black and white. Why not have been honest in negotiation, why not have made them citizens as did her Majesty the Queen, thus encouraging their self-respect and dignity, instead of debasing them

into cooped-up dependents. Len imagined he could hear the sarcastic laugh of the long line of gray-haired statesmen and generals who had grappled with the question face to face. Yes, he knew their arguments. He too had had a border experience with the natives, which reveals only their most revolting characteristics; but, if met with the simple honesty which would have been theirs too, in fair dealing, and with such qualities to work with—courage, devotion to family, generosity, intelligence, pride—what might not have been attained? He glowed with the vision of some day erecting a mighty monument on the great plains yonder, and cut deep in the splendid bronze should be the memories and traditions and the sad history of a fated race. Red Cloud had once said, "White man lies and steals. My lodges were many but now they are few. The white man wants all. The white man must fight and the Indian will die where his fathers died." Naya's fathers!—for the petty tribal distinctions disappear in this mutual tragedy of death and devastation. Little Naya! Beloved child! She has many of their traits——the imagination, the pride—yes, the Indian

pride was hers all right. That d—— scoundrel from Poison Spider! Len clenched his fist in sudden anger.

An ugly reputation had followed the Christmas newcomer, and he had proved his right to it. One day a familiar remark had been met with haughtiness on Naya's side, and afterwards in the corral the wag had used his tongue rather freely. "Nuthin' but a d—— little squaw. He'd take the pride out o' her some day." Having momentarily laid aside his cartridge belt and its formidable adjunct, Len had seized a quirt and lashed the man across the mouth. The whole bunk house had been on his side and, after various threats, the man from Poison Spider had taken his departure.

The shore of the lake was reached now and right there was the camp. Len's pulse suddenly raced. How he would love to give his life in her defense—in her service, and then if by and by—! He could have knelt to the beautiful holy thought.

There came a shout, and he saw two horsemen issuing from the verge of the wood not far

away. Naya was not by the fire; probably she had gone into the tent to arrange her things.

"Here they are," he called. "The compass has mended his needle."

William groaned as he dismounted.

"Rajah slipped on some beastly wet needles, and I'm afraid my ankle is sprained. I jumped, but he just caught me," and he limped toward the fire.

"I'm a nice one. It's all my fault," said Arthur ruefully. "I guess the woods around Clifdale are all I'm up to. But Jiminy, it was like riding in my coffin. I couldn't see a thing, and I suppose I kept pulling Firefly the wrong way. Got a deer though, you bet. He's hanging on a tree up there. Firefly wouldn't let me pack him."

He was helping unsaddle.

"We must stake 'em or they'll follow the others," and Len began to tell him about the stampede.

"Why, where is Naya?" called William.

"Ain't she in the tent?" asked Len, hastily tying Rajah to the nearest tree. "I went down to the head of the cañon to see if I couldn't turn

the horses. I wasn't gone more than ten or fifteen minutes and just came in when you did. I thought she was in the tent."

"She is probably up to her waist in that icy water, picking lilies out in the moonlight," said William without great anxiety. "She is a perfect Will-o-the-wisp in the mountains. "Naya! Naya!" he called, but an eerie echo floating far on the silent lake was the only response. "Why, where did she go?"

Len's face grew white.

"Look!" he said, "everything's upset. Do you think it was a bear?"

He found the lantern, but his hand shook so that he could hardly light it. William, unconscious of his ankle, seized it and ran into the tent.

"It's those d—— Blackfeet. I knew it before I saw this," and he held the portfolio toward the boys.

Suddenly he lost his English gentleman aspect and the lantern's dim light shone on a fierce-eyed frontiersman, with face as pale and determined as death. A great sob rose to Len's throat; after all he was little more than a boy.

He caught at it with his thin brown hand. "This is no time for cryin', but for actin', you cussed baby idiot," he said to himself.

William's foot was swelling frightfully, and Len began taking off his boot.

"We can't do anything till daylight," he said in a steady voice. "We can't trail 'em in the dark, and we'd only loose time by tryin'. I'll just fix this ankle with some cold water and truck Mrs. Warren gave me, and we'll get dried out and ready to start. It's a mighty aggravatin' plan." He and Arthur began preparations. The latter moved about mechanical and dazed, for he thought by some curious twist, he had come to live in one of his own "Leather Stocking Tales" that so often haunted his dreams. Soon a big pot of venison was on the fire, and Len was mixing another batch of bread. It was evident that he was not thinking of their comfort.

"Mustn't shoot when you're trailin' Indians, even if the game's thicker'n grass. She'll be hungry on that homeward run. Let's see—five hours—six hours start, and they've got relays fixed along the way." He was talking half to himself.

William sat absently drinking his tea, one cup after another. He was afraid a ligament in his ankle was torn. The pain was frightful. Why couldn't these thunderbolts have fallen separately? But he would go if it killed him. Arthur must stay here until Dougal came the next night and direct him to come north with horses. He and Len would pursue the trail at daybreak.

Wun-nes-tou was a sly devil. Good behavior and thrift had won the good-will of the agency people and he, with his party, had been permitted to leave the reservation to hunt and trap. Think of their coming all this way! It was incredible, but the Indian travels like a bird. They had skirted civilization and secreted their camp in some wild mountain fastness. But where? Bighorn, Wolf, Rosebud mountains? The trail would solve that question if their wily methods had not completely covered it. Why, what did they expect to attain by such a violent move? They were like children in their reasoning—sometimes; but what determination, what cunning! Of course if he and Len did not find her soon, he would report it and arouse the country. In this extremity even *she* would have him do it,

despite her sorrow for their wrongs and her sympathy with their defiance.

Len was silently packing his little sack of provisions. William had made no response to his plans, and the young cow-puncher's heart was bursting with doubt and grief. His own conscience was vindicating, but he wondered if William blamed him. William caught sight of his face, grown suddenly drawn and old, and divining his thoughts, rose and stretched out his hand.

"Don't think, Len, my boy, that I blame you for this. I have left her alone in camp time and time again for the same purpose. Your plans are excellent."

Before he realized it, he was reeling with agony and Len was half carrying him to his bed in the tent.

"It'll be light in a couple of hours," said Len presently, "and if you'll just trust me, sir, I think I ought to go alone. You can't travel with your foot in such a fix. Of course it's as you say, but if I could just have Rajah! I've done lots of trailin', you know." His voice seemed to come from a great distance.

"It isn't that I don't trust you, Len. Toward daybreak I will make another trial. It will be better then. Just wet that towel again. My poor baby! My poor little Naya!"

According with his wishes, they arranged his bed in the open, for, although it was intensely cold, the night had become as clear as crystal. His preparations finished, Len lay rolled in a blanket watching the east. Occasionally he gave Arthur some whispered directions.

"Take Firefly and get the horses back to-morrow, and tell Dougal to make for Antelope Springs with Comet and Pehta. Better jam for the ranch right off and get the doctor from over town to fix up his ankle. He can't possibly go with me. I'm afraid it's busted some way."

With the appearance of the first thin veil of gray, William rose bravely, telling Len to saddle both horses, but when he tried to pull on his boot, he was seized with such a paroxysm of pain that he sank back resistless.

"Go, Len. I would only be a hindrance. Don't shoot unless it is necessary. I trust your judgment. I want to keep this thing out of the papers, and nothing travels to the press like lead

bullets. Newspaper notoriety! Heaven help the child!. Just be a bit wary. We'll give them a little of their own medicine. Once safe at the ranch, we'll just keep this thing hushed up, and I'll get her out of the country. I trust you, my boy. Be careful of yourself. The Blackfeet are devils when their blood is up."

Len soon found their trail in the fern brake and, mounted on Rajah, he too headed northward.

CHAPTER XIII

Hope is brightest when it dawns from fears.
SCOTT—*The Lady of the Lake.*

Meanwhile the Indians were picking their way through forest and cañon with the unerring instinct of all children of the wilds. Their stout little ponies never faltered, but scrambled and slid down the dark, slippery hillsides as if they realized the important part they played in the conspiracy, and were determined that it should not fall through for lack of courage and endurance on their side.

Naya's submission was but skin deep, and when she saw there were only two horses, she made a rapid plan to escape. White Buffalo had placed her back of his saddle, realizing that the pony would travel better if the greater weight were forward, and, as they rounded the western portion of the lake, just under the cliffs which a few moments later caught William's cry, she saw her opportunity and seized it. There was a

black strip of underbrush, and just beyond, the rushes and lily pads that bordered the lake. It was hardly a quarter of a mile across to the camp fire and, although the water was freezing, she was determined to try it. Iron Horn was a little in advance. Without a sound she slipped over the pony's tail to the ground and was wriggling into the sheltering brush; but the pony jumped, and, without saying a word, White Buffalo lifted her up again, this time in front of him, and they proceeded as silently as before.

Hour after hour passed and she never spoke. Once a gleam of natural kindness, the kindness that characterized his race before the advent of the white man, seemed to touch the Indian's revengeful heart, and asking if she were hungry, he offered her a piece of bread. She struck it from his hand. He gave a short, angry laugh, but in the depths of his Indian nature there was admiration for her spirit and her cunning. He himself could not have planned a better escape. If the pony had not jumped, she would have been in the lake before he noticed she was gone. Her mother was a remarkable swimmer; she outstripped both her brothers in swiftness, if not in

White Buffalo lifted her up again, this time in front of him.

endurance, and probably this child was like her. If they could only awaken the race loyalty that is an Indian's birthright, then they could snap their fingers at the fork-tongued white man, her father; but she was a wild cat and it would take time to tame her. When she was a papoose, she loved the old grandmother. They would see.

Occasionally he and Iron Horn exchanged a brief remark. Naya gathered that fresh horses were not far. She looked up at the black tree tops waving against the dark silver-blue sky, and it seemed to her that the stars were huddled together in anxious consultation, and that the pale shafts of moonlight, wandering like wraiths in the forest, were constantly beckoning and calling, "Escape! Escape!" But the arm that held her was like the iron clamp of a prison. For one surging instant she was tempted to lean and bite it; then, like a majestic presence, the dignity inherited from two mighty races asserted itself and the wild impulse fled before its calming gaze. "I must do nothing unworthy of father," she thought. He and Len would hunt for her, of course, but when daylight came the Indians would begin covering the trail. What

if they never found her at all? She struggled with a sob. At least she would not give him the satisfaction of seeing her cry.

They halted abruptly and, in the clear light, Naya saw a young Indian standing on a stone in a wide creek and holding three horses that champed restlessly in the cold water. Could it be? He spoke now, and she distinctly recognized the soft, gay voice of Rushing Wind, the Crow guide. It was he who had put the Blackfeet on their trail. This is what he had meant that morning on Big Piney when he said they would meet soon again. She remembered now his sly laugh. Naya's anger shook her with sudden fury, but she stood by, silent and motionless as they rapidly changed the saddles.

"I hope the little daughter of Eagle Ribs be not angry," he said teasingly.

She did not answer. White Buffalo said a few sharp words to him, and he ceased molesting her.

Her heart fell when she heard their plans. It seems that Rushing Wind had led the horses in the stream for a mile or more, and that they were to return in the same way, while he, after a brief

rest, was to continue in another direction with the horses they had been riding, leading one at a sufficient length to give the impression of two riders. Every now and then he was to make a show at concealing his trail—too frank a trail would make the white man suspicious. After misleading them for one moon, he was to double back, following barren rocks and streams, concealing every hoof print and every sign, and, upon striking their trail, was to follow it to a certain pocket in the Rosebud Mountains, where the Crow brother would receive a liberal reward.

Naya retained but a confused recollection of the days and night that followed. She meant neither to sleep nor to eat until she was safe in her father's arms, and consequently, at the end of the first day, she was so faint and dazed that she fell from her pony. She remembered nothing except that White Buffalo had picked her up, and when she awakened, it was broad daylight and they were traveling in a country that was entirely strange to her. She was carefully wrapped in a striped blanket and her head was pillowed against the Indian's shoulder. Evi-

dently it had been storming, for the red bluffs and stunted pines were delicately sprinkled with new snow. White Buffalo saw she was awake.

"The white woman has a strange custom," he began with that faint strain of kindness in his guttural voice. "At the time of marriage she covers herself with a veil as of snow. Look, little daughter of the Ziarzapas,[1] it is a sign for thee. The Great Spirit has covered the earth with a bridal veil. We would thou wouldst marry and live forever in the wigwam of thy people. Ma-què-a-pos[2] is a brave and noble warrior. The life of the *napiquan* is not for thee. I know thee well. Thy mother, the pure and lovely Crystal Stone, was my sister. She was a child of the laughing streams and of the fiery sunsets. Thou are like her, little daughter of Cristecoom."

There was a voice in Naya's ear like the faint wild echo of another existence. The sound came nearer—mounted—mounted, until she held her breath and bent her head while the winds of inheritance swept about her. Oh, the sound of rushing waters, the rain-beaten leaves blowing

[1] Blackfeet.

[2] The Wolf's Word.

in her face, the long wild sweep of the storm down the mountain side, and everywhere freedom—freedom—freedom!

She waited a long time before answering. All anger between them seemed to have departed, for finally she said as kindly as he, "Thou art right. I am of thy race, and I love the life of the Indian; but I cannot leave my father. He is sad since, in the Moon of Flowers, the pure and lovely Crystal Stone was taken from him. I shall return to him."

She was sitting up now and gazing somberly into the dark visage of her captor. A deeper gloom settled over the face of the chief, but the expression of fierce tyranny in the restless black eyes had changed to one of brooding patience and determination. He made no response; and it was their only conversation during the days of flight.

Soon after nightfall they came in sight of the Indian encampment. Naya could see the outline of a half dozen wigwams, and many dark figures passed and repassed in the circle of firelight. Her heart gave a leap, half of delight, half of fear. "I am two people," she cried to

herself; then as if foreseeing the life of unrest and struggle that lay before her, she began praying passionately, imperiously, "Cristecoom, Cristecoom, make me just one—just one—like father—just one!" Her father's gray eyes seemed to gaze at her through the dusk. There were tears in them, and there in the beautiful room by the singing waterfall was the little white bed, all smooth and untouched. Perhaps Pigeon had scaled the fence and was out there rubbing her nose against the pane. Perhaps they were all at the ranch by this time; perhaps they would not hunt for her after all. She bent over the saddle horn with a little moan of homesickness. Suddenly the ponies stopped, and a trembling old voice pierced the tumult around her.

"My baby Crystal Stone. She is dead. Many moons is she dead. My heart was barren. It was as the Moon of Snows, but now it is as the Moon of Leaves. Little Stars-on-the-River, come to thy grandmother."

It was old Sweet Grass, the Indian grandmother. The curious throng reverently made way for her, and when Naya's searching eyes caught sight of the old cinnamon bark face and

the tear-drenched smile that spoke of her mother, she slipped from the pony and, burying her face on her grandmother's breast, burst into uncontrollable tears. White Buffalo laid a peremptory hand on her shoulder.

"The others watch. It is not well for a Blackfoot maiden to show her feelings."

It was a voice of command. Instantly she was silent, but her eyes burned with defiance as he led her into the lodge.

The old squaw, evidently accustomed to repression, crooned and mumbled happily as she bent over a pot of meat simmering on the fire. The cheerful blaze brightened the scarlet calico of her dress and caught the long white shell earrings that dangled about her breast as she moved. The broad sweet face, with its fold on fold of crumpled brown skin, was mellowed in a smile of infinite content and gladness.

But Naya's heart was raging. If, on the one side, her Indian ancestors called and beckoned from the wilderness, on the other were the dim shadows of proud and stately Englishwomen who, with haughty grace, pointed to her place in their ranks. Their passing was like that of

queens, and in their pathway were strewn the fairest flowers of homage and courtesy. Think of his presuming to order her about as if she were—yes, a squaw!

A baby's cry came from another part of the lodge, and her face melted. The wreaths of smoke, idly curling toward the aperture above, so screened the rear of the wigwam that she could not see just whence the sound came. She ran to the other side of the fire, and there, in his prison of buckskin and beads, was a mite of a brown baby emitting a *sassaskivi*[1] fit to thrill the scalp locks of a hundred warriors.

"Pah kaps! Pah kaps! Essummissa!"[2] said Naya, laughing and patting the tiny tear wet cheek with one hand, while in the other she whirled her bead necklace. A young squaw rushed out of the shadows and seized the baby by the nose. He strangled and struggled for an instant in an endeavor to bewail this fresh onslaught of misery, then relaxed like a submissive rag doll. When the mother let go the little bump meant for his nose, he gave a gasp of as-

[1] War whoop.

[2] "Bad! Bad! Look there."

tonishment and then laughed outright, as if he felt the joke was on him. White Buffalo stood by watching, amusement and fatherly pride lighting his gloomy eyes.

"My wife and my son, hereditary chief of the tribe," he said to Naya proudly. It was evident that he adored his family.

"How ne tucka,"[1] said the comely young squaw pleasantly, and she turned away to help Sweet Grass with the supper.

When it was ready, Naya seated herself close to the old grandmother, her unhappy eyes never leaving the fire, except to smile faintly on some crooning caress. Had it not been for an aching something, how she could have thrown herself into this sweet simple family life of the Indian. White Buffalo had unlaced the deerskin thongs that imprisoned his bright-eyed offspring and, laughing at the indignant protestations of the mother, was feeding him with bits of meat. Overhead the stars clustered about the aperture as if to crown this humble home of nature's own children. Sweet Grass was greatly disturbed because the little stranger would eat nothing

[1] "How art thou?"

and, like grandmothers the world over, suddenly bethought herself of something which might tempt the lagging appetite. She disappeared for a moment and returned with a basket of fragrant wild strawberries. They lay on a bed of delicate green leaves, so arranged that the basket's edge was wreathed with blossoms. Quick tears sprang to Naya's eyes.

"Beautiful mother would have made it so," she said and kissed old Sweet Grass' withered cheek. But she ate only a few.

"Cho hetta ke tesistico?" [1] asked the chief kindly.

"Sah," [2] she said shortly, her eyes on the fire.

"Ah! Ah!" [3] quavered Sweet Grass. "My baby is tired. To-morrow will she eat of the *ponokah* and the *kekstakee*. She will help me dry the *mummea*. [4] We will talk of the beautiful Crystal Stone and be happy. *Pohks a pote,*[5] Nayatohta."

The grandmother would have led her to her

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[1] "Art thou tired?"

[2] "No!"

[3] "Yes! Yes!"

[4] Fish.

[5] "Come here."

own little wigwam close to that of the chief, but White Buffalo interposed abruptly.

"Sah! She must sleep here."

The old mother obediently arranged the bed as she was commanded, while Naya stood in the entrance of the lodge looking out on the village. Near by an Indian boy, who had sprinkled water on his tom-tom, grown flabby with use, was holding it to a great central fire to dry and shrink. In its light a half dozen young bucks were gambling on a blanket. The one who held the bone was waving his arms with bewildering rapidity and his side laughed uproariously at the mystified expression of their opponents. Naya's eyes lit with momentary interest. She loved the game. She herself could not tell which hand the bone was in. Was it the right? No—the left. The opponent had guessed right and gained a point for his side. They were playing for beaver skins she thought, for she could see a pile of something on the far end of the blanket.

Then the dreadful homesickness came back with a rush. If she could only sleep in the little *tepee* there with Grandmother Sweet Grass,

she could perhaps slip away in the night, but the chief was too wary to give her such a chance. Sweet Grass called her and helped her undress. The loving old fingers fumbled awkwardly with the strange fastenings, but Naya was patient, knowing how much pleasure it gave the adoring soul. She shrank a little from the blanket and skins that covered her. "I an Indian!" she thought scornfully, "I who have more fear of the dirt than of the so fierce lion. Even the so clean English father laughs to—at me sometimes." She was already drifting on a current of heavy, tired sleep when the sound of plaintive music made her stir and start up.

"What is it, Grandmother Sweet Grass?" she whispered to the old squaw, who was lying close beside her.

There it was again! Faint mournful strains that wandered on the night breeze like the thoughts of the dying.

"Only the music of the willow stem, little strawberry blossom," said Sweet Grass soothingly. "The Boy of the Willow Music struck his father and must fast on the hill for three days. Sleep, little flower of Cristecoom."

In the morning Naya was so pale and weak that the grandmother was frightened.

"It is nothing," said the chief. "She is tired and mourns for her white father. We must have patience. I will bring the brave and noble warrior Ma-què-a-pos, who would wed her. She will have children and be one of us and forget the fork-tongued white man and his ways."

"Not yet! Not yet!" pleaded gentle Sweet Grass, her old face working with emotion.

"Yes," said White Buffalo sternly, "we are dying. I must uphold the life and strength of my nation. It is enough."

The old squaw turned humbly to her tasks, but the tears gathered in the creases of her wrinkled face.

Naya sat listless on the bank of the stream. It was no use trying to make her escape; she was too well watched for that, and should she slip away, where was she, and which way should she go? No, there was nothing to do but to wait. Presently her reverie was interrupted by Sweet Grass, who bore a brimming gourd in her hands.

"Grandmother Sweet Grass," said Naya aghast, yet half laughing, "not all of that!"

"Ah! Ah! My little mourning dove must drink, then she will be strong like the young doe."

It was a fearful beverage, concocted of bitter herbs and the bark of the wild cherry, but the child gulped heroically in spite of smarting eyes and puckering mouth. Then for an instant her natural fun welled within her.

"Thou hast killed me," she laughed, making a grotesque face. "I love Grandmother Sweet Grass too much to leave her behind. We will go to the Happy Hunting Grounds together."

She seized the astonished old squaw with one hand and with the other tried to administer the dregs of her own medicine. The morning rippled with the child's laughter, and the quiet faces of a few scattered Indians relaxed in involuntary smiles. Notwithstanding her seventy-odd years, Sweet Grass broke away and made for the wigwam with the gayety, if not the grace, of a maiden of seventeen. Her mild old face beamed with fun, and now and then little cackles of delight broke from her as she ran. Surely it

was the laughter and light footstep of her baby Crystal Stone there behind her.

She stopped in sudden consternation, for the chief stood in the entrance to the wigwam, and there beside him was The Wolf's Word, with a deer thrown over his shoulder and presents of blankets and bead work hanging on one arm. He solemnly approached Naya and laid them on the grass at her feet. She knew what it meant, and the laughter died from her eyes. She paused in agitation, swept by an entirely new fear. The chief's former allusion to her marriage had seemed to do with a vague and dreamlike future, and she had thought no more about it. She looked from one to another in helpless dismay, then she became finely mistress of herself. Her direct pure gaze sought the eyes of the waiting brave.

"We are the children of Cristecoom, and we must live as he wishes, is it not so, my brother? He wishes that I cling always to my English father, for his heart is full of sorrow. The sun of the lovely Crystal Stone sleeps behind the western hills, and he is alone. As soon as I can, I go to him. I love you all, I am proud that

you are my people; but I cannot live among you."

White Buffalo gave a significant grunt. He would see, he thought to himself.

As if divining his thoughts, she continued simply, "Cristecoom gave me life. If I am forced to—to live here, I shall return it to him. I have said all." And she walked proudly into the wigwam.

"Patience!" said White Buffalo doggedly.

"Patience!" echoed the melancholy brave, his eyes following her wistfully.

"Sah! Sah!" wailed Sweet Grass, *"mahto mahxim."* [1]

Toward evening Naya and her grandmother gathered strawberries on the hills surrounding the village. The child's face was white and sad, but it brightened as Sweet Grass said, "I trust thee, little fawn. Thou wilt not tell thy uncle. The *sah komapee* [2] in yonder wood makes fast and I bring him food. My foolish old heart will not bear that the young go hungry. Iron Horn

[1] "She is young."

[2] Boy.

watched on the hill, but he has gone for his *ponokah meta.* [1] Stay not, for he returns."

Naya was filled with sudden excitement and hope and, taking the basket, slipped swiftly into the wood. The rebellious young Blackfoot did not see her at first. He sat on a fallen log, his magic pipe to his lips, whence came the plaintive strains that had so touched her the night before. His dress consisted only of breech clout and moccasins, and his lithe young shoulders shone like bronze in the slanting rays of the departing sun. He made a charming picture, sitting among the patches of brilliant green lichen which mottled the gray and spike-like branches of the fallen tree.

"Brother, here is meat of the *ouacasee.* Sweet Grass sends it. I am Naya, thy unhappy sister. My father it was who married Crystal Stone, and they have stolen me from him. If thou seest a white man, give him this and say I will be here again to-morrow night and that we will run—run."

She was breathless and half crying with excitement. The Indian boy had never seen her

[1] Horse.

before and, as the decree had been solitude and starvation for three days, he was filled with blankest astonishment. Without waiting for him to speak, Naya thrust the food and handkerchief into his hands and departed as swiftly as she had come.

It was a bare hope, but she took heart. The following day she seemed so happy and so much at home that the Indians were encouraged, and the wistful eyes of The Wolf's Word, watching from afar, lost their hopelessness. Patience! It is the watchword of the Indian. Had they but known, it was only a ruse to relax their suspicious custody. Consequently, at sundown she had no trouble in gaining the wood; but she spent the night in restless tossing. *"Sah! Sah!* little sister," the boy had said.

The next morning she heard White Buffalo giving his orders to the village.

"To-night when the *cogue ahtose*[1] rises, we start for *O-màx-enn.*[2] The *mummea* are gone, the *ponokah* and *kekstakee* are now few. Be ready!"

[1] Moon.

[2] A lake near the British border.

Naya was in despair, but she tried to appear happy, for therein lay her only hope. However, the watchful old squaw was not deceived.

"For shame, little mourning dove," she said chidingly, "wouldst thou return to the *napiquan?* We are thy people, and once from the rising *cristeque ahtose* [1] to the setting *cristeque ahtose* was the land ours. Why is it ours no longer? The *napiquan,* our enemy and thine, has robbed us. I must soon cross the Great River. It will not be long now. Stay, little Stars-on-the-River, stay with thy old Grandmother Sweet Grass."

Naya clung to her. "Perhaps *I* will soon cross the Great River," she thought. She was determined not to go north with them. If the Boy of the Willow Music had seen no one, she would run—run just the same, not back to Sweet Grass, but on—on through the woods and hills. If they found her and forced her—there was an instant of violent, terrible anguish, but the brave thoughts never flinched. Others of her race had done it—she of the Lake of the Dying Face and she of the Falls of the Silver Tears.

[1] Sun.

The old-fashioned grandmother insisted on giving her a steam bath.

"Thou art whiter than the blossom of the cherry in the Moon of Flowers," she said tenderly. "I would see thy sweet cheeks like the summer dawn."

She made a tiny circular hut of bended willows, covered with heavy blankets, so that every breath of air would be excluded. Naya sat within pouring water on the heated stones until she was almost parboiled, but someway the physical distress was a welcome diversion. When she thought the cure was complete, the sturdy old squaw wrapped a blanket around the suffocated child and, carrying her briskly to the creek, threw her into an ice cold pool. Naya laughed, it seemed so ridiculous, but when it was over and she had found fresh things in her sack, she felt surprisingly strong and well. Then Sweet Grass brought a bowl of gruel, made from the wild rice.

"Thou must eat, for the journey is long."

"Ah! Ah! The journey is long," sighed Naya. Then to her grandmother's delight, she asked for trout.

"No oks kum innuya," [1] she said, smiling.

While she sat shaking her wet hair in the wind, she watched the sun as it wheeled toward the west. Occasionally she prayed wildly, incoherently that it would not leave her to another night of loneliness. She could hear old Sweet Grass singing as she worked in the willows close by. It was a song of lament for the younger son, long since dead.

"O my son! farewell,
Thou hast gone beyond the Great River;
Thy spirit is on the other side of the sand buttes;
I will not see thee for a hundred winters.
Thou wilt scalp the enemy in the green prairie
Beyond the Great River
When the warriors of the Blackfeet meet;
When they smoke the medicine pipe
And dance the war dance
They will ask, 'Where is Is-thu-ma-ka,
Where is the bravest of the Maime kappi?'
He fell in the war path. Mai-ram-bo, Mai-ram-bo."

Naya's face was sad as she rose.

"Grandmother," she said, "there are more strawberries by the little wood, and the night comes fast."

[1] "Three long ones."

"Neet ahkse," [1] said she cheerily. "Put the *mummea* in the basket. The *sah komapee* has another day to fast. He follows on foot when the *cogue ahtose* rises. We are safe. Thy uncle lacks wisdom sometimes. He told Red Leaf to watch on the hill while the warriors hunt the *ouacasee,* but he too has gone. He is a foolish *mahtsee.* [2] When the time comes, little Stars, we will not marry thee to such as he."

Naya braided her hair as they climbed the hill, and old Sweet Grass crooned another verse of her song.

"Many scalps will be taken for thy death;
The Crows will lose many horses;
Their women will weep for their braves;
They will curse the Spirit of Is-thu-ma-ka.
O my son! I will come to thee
And make moccasins for the war path
As I did when thou didst strike the lodge
Of the Homeguard with the tomahawk.
Farewell, my son! I will see thee
Beyond the broad river.
Mai-ram-bo, Mai-ram-bo!"

They were crossing a grassy dip close to the wood when Naya turned and put her hands on the old squaw's shoulders.

[1] "Very well."

[2] A brave.

"Grandmother Sweet Grass," she said, her lips trembling, "I love thee, but I must go to my father. I must—I must; I die without him. If thou didst love the beautiful Crystal Stone, if thou dost love her unhappy *pohka,*[3] Stars-on-the-River, thou wilt help me."

"Cristecoom, *sah!*[4] Cristecoom, *sah!*" wailed Sweet Grass, "and I will so soon cross the Great River!"

"I cannot stay—I cannot. Oh, forgive me, dear Grandmother Sweet Grass. Let me go. Thou knowest the Lake of the Dying Face. I shall be like her." And Naya rapidly related what had passed between her and the prisoner in the little wood and of her determination to escape, at all events.

"I could have gone without telling thee," she concluded, "but I wanted to speak my love for thee and my sorrow at leaving thee."

A beautiful light passed into the tear-dimmed eyes of old Sweet Grass.

"The Great Spirit bless thee, little Stars-on-the-River. Thou must hasten. I will pray for

[3] Child.

[4] Evil Spirit.

thee, I will keep them from the knowledge of thy absence as long as possible. Farewell, my child. Mayst thou reach the wigwam of the Bear's Child in safety."

Naya sobbed her gratitude and rained tears and kisses on the sweet old face. In another moment she was in the wood.

The Boy of the Willow Music sat waiting for her. His melancholy air had vanished and excitement trembled in every sinew. Naya snatched a red silk handkerchief from his hand.

"Len!" she cried.

"Ah! Ah! Napiquan. He waits for thee."

Hand in hand they sped through the silent wood.

Sweet Grass was weeping for her children. She lingered in the strawberry patch until the shadows deepened in the folds of the hills and were blotting the pale saffron from the skies.

"Is-thu-ma-ka — Eeh-nis-kim — Nayatohta, they are gone and I am alone." Softly lamenting, she crept up the hill that sloped toward the village. There she hid among some pines and waited. White Buffalo rode in from the hunt, and Sweet Grass raised her shrill old voice.

"We are here. Nayatohta would watch the dying sunset."

He looked up, and nodded in reply.

The old squaw rocked back and forth on her seat of dry pine needles.

"My baby! In the falling leaf time will I come to thee. Not longer, Mother of God. Not longer, O Cristecoom." So the piteous lamentations continued, the expressions of wild superstition intermingled with strange little Catholic phrases, probably gathered years before from some wandering "Black Gown."

Presently White Buffalo came out of the wigwam.

"Come!" he called, "the *cogue ahtose* rises soon. There is much to do."

Sweet Grass bravely controlled her weeping.

"Nayatohta would count the stars."

"There is no time. Return."

But Sweet Grass only moaned softly to herself. "He was ever the least loving of my babies. He will kill me. It is well. Little baby Crystal Stone, thou art beyond the Great River; thou art in the arms of the Virgin. Cristecoom!

Cristecoom! Put her little head once more upon my breast."

"Why dost thou not come? I say come many times. It grows late," said White Buffalo's voice a few paces down the hill.

The old Indian mother's tender heart quailed beneath its harshness.

"Nayatohta gathers flowers close by," she began, but her voice broke.

"It is dark," he said. "One cannot see the flowers. Where is she? Quick!"

"Gone!" said old Sweet Grass, weeping bitterly.

"Gone! Escaped! Thou didst let her?" He seized her by the arm and shook her. "Did the white man come?"

"I know not. The Lake of the Dying Face—she said it, she meant it—she is of our race. Strike me. Kill me. I would die, for I am alone," and she lay weeping at the feet of her son and chief.

Suddenly the *sassaskivi* rang through the village.

"Quick! The *ponokah meta!* There will be

an *otokan epascat.*[1] I am *ahecooa nin nah.*[2] The *napiquan* defies me. What do I care for their warriors? I would die fighting them. The *napiquan* has come and stolen the *ahkeoquoin.*[3] They have taken all—all. The Blackfeet will be avenged."

The village was in a turmoil. There was a short council and the warriors departed, leaving the night as silent as before.

The Boy of the Willow Music sat in the darkness of the wood, listening, his magic pipe suspended. Was it the moaning of the pines? Was it the sigh of distant waters? No. He understood.

Sweet Grass was weeping for her children.

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[1] Scalp dance.
[2] A great chief.
[3] Maiden.

CHAPTER XIV

'T is much he dares,
And, to that dauntless temper of his mind,
He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour
To act in safety.

SHAKSPERE—*Macbeth.*

Naya laughed softly, joyously, and beat her little hand on the saddle horn.

"And then, Len, what did you?"

"I thought the camp was around here somewhere, so I tied Rajah down the gulch, and was crawlin' around in the wood when I heard that funny wailin' music. I peeked through the brush, and there he sat lookin' like a picture in one of Mr. Dunsmuir's books—one of them books of Greek gods and goddesses, and hangin' to a branch above his head was a little white handkerchief a flutterin' in the wind. I knowed right away it was yours, and I sort o' guessed that maybe he was on our side, so I steps up right quick and says, 'Friend.' I thought maybe he would know that word, and sure enough, 'Friend,' answers he; but that's all he knowed,

for droppin' his willow on the moss soft like as if it was a baby and might wake up, he snatched down the handkerchief and begins a makin' signs like as if we were both deaf and dumb. He pointed toward the sun—it was only two hours ago, you know, and then closed his eyes as if goin' to sleep; then openin' them quick he pointed toward the camp and patted the handkerchief and then the ground, so I knowed you'd be there about sundown. The Indian kids don't know the old sign language much, I guess. The white people is changin' their customs pretty fast, but he sure was a good one at makin' up one of his own. Then he signs me to follow and hides me in the far end of that strip o' wood where Rajah was and goes back to that creepy music makin'. That hour seemed a plumb century. He's sure a rummy kid. What's his name?"

"Boy of the Willow Music, Grandmother Sweet Grass calls him. And then we did run—run and find you and Rajah, and now we will never, never stop until we are with father."

The eyes she turned toward him were the happiest Len had ever seen. He thought vague-

ly of a deep, deep mountain pool he had passed a few days since, whose surface trembled with rifts of sunlight and the reflection of wind-tossed leaves.

"I hope so," he said a little gravely, "but Rajah's awful tired. Poor old fellow!" and he put a sympathetic hand on the gray's gaunt side. "He's had pretty steady travelin' for most a week now. I'm afraid your father will think I was pretty slow, but the trail was so mixed up. If he can hold out another eight or ten hours, we'll be at Antelope Springs, and then we're all right. Dougal is there with horses and they won't bother the two of us."

They were already several miles from the Indian village, and Rajah had settled into his best gait, which he could sustain for hours without being winded. The frankness with which they skirted the brush and bits of woodland might have seemed unwise, but Len's one thought was to reach the Springs and Dougal. Not that he had the slightest fear for himself, but he meant if possible to accomplish his mission without the "lead bullets" that William had warned him against.

Of course there was some chance of being seen by one or even several of the hunters, for he was taking the most open route, and in that case they would try to pick him off at a distance, probably would, for the Indians were fine shots, and they doubtless had the best Winchesters they could buy. Then he would have failed; Naya would be recaptured, dragged north into the wilderness, perhaps sicken and die of the hardships the fleeing Indians would subject her to, and he would lie here defeated, dishonored, a prey to the vultures! It was the fleeting image of an overtired mind and imagination. He had spoken briefly to Naya of the mixed up trail, of Rajah's splendid endurance, of his anxiety for her, but nothing of his own hardships.

The look of happiness and triumph, which had temporarily extinguished the lines of fatigue, departed, leaving his face drawn and anxious. It was not over by any means. Perhaps he ought to travel in the brush after all, but Rajah began to show alarming signs of giving out. His gait slackened and seemed strained. No, he must save his strength and further the rapidity of their flight by keeping to the open. The bet-

ter hunting was north, he thought; perhaps the Indians had gone in that direction.

"How most glad father will be!" said Naya, breaking her happy reverie.

Then she caught sight of his haggard eyes. They had lost their soft topaz glow and were scanning the bluffs with a strange and hawk-like keenness. Like a flash she realized his deep sense of responsibility, and saw the days of toil and dread which he had undergone for her sake. Something deep and untouched stirred within her.

"Dear Lennie," she said softly, "so brave—so tired. I give you such great, great trouble—a so terrible journey. Father always kisses me to forgive my badness," and she lifted her face to him, all alight with one of her warm-hearted smiles.

The strained look died from Len's eyes. He trembled, and for one ineffable moment his lips touched her cheek. Then he dismounted.

"I'll just run for awhile," he said, flashing a brief look at her. "Rajah's gettin' tired."

Despite his fatigue he set off at a rapid, steady pace. The day before a stretch of clearly de-

fined trail had given such unmistakable evidence of the Indians' intended destination, that he had not paused at nightfall, but pushed on through the darkness, feeling certain he could recover it at daylight. He had not slept for almost forty-eight hours and, in order to save the horse, many of these had been spent on foot. But as he ran, his thoughts had nothing to do with sleepless nights and lost trails and days of desperate anxiety.

There was a quiet paling of the lustrous tinted sunset, and the comforting twilight came stealing over the hills. "Never, never again!" he said to himself passionately, "not even her cheek—until—" Yes, until. Why should he struggle against it any longer? Why should he deny it? Impossible! He suddenly saw his love as a gift from that mystic Being, in whose presence all the cant of religions and sects shrivels like corn husks, a gift to *her,* a beautiful something which had risen in his soul like the morning sun, and whose rays of tenderness and strength and devotion were to shine upon her and glorify her life unto the end of all things. Why should he deny her that supreme

blessing? All the arguments and qualms of conscience that had characterized his former struggles disappeared like the mist before a new and resplendent day. If her father took her to England? If she never returned? Well, he would go after her—in a few years. Perhaps some quiet evening like this—all soft dusk and pale yellow skies—he would be telling her—holding her— Len drew a long breath. The thought of her womanhood was like a sacrament.

Rajah stumbled and fell heavily to his knees.

"He most dead, poor Rajah," said Naya, slipping to the ground, "I think he go not much farther."

After a moment of labored effort the horse regained his footing and turned to look at them with patient, wondering eyes. Len's exultation was quenched in this fresh anxiety. He ran to a tiny rill that welled from the hillside nearby and caught a hat full of water, with which he rapidly washed the poor beast's mouth.

"There's nothin' to do but to hide in the brush and let 'im rest. It's fifteen miles yet to Antelope Springs and—"

"But I will walk—will run," interrupted Naya. "I am feeling most strong, really."

"No, no! It's too far, besides, Rajah's too beat to travel even without a load. About a half mile east is a big bluff—steep and high except where it kind o' slopes to a strip of plain on one side. It's a regular trap, so they won't think we're up there."

They cut across the hills to the left, Len leading the tired, stumbling horse.

"Better hold to my hand," he said. "These hills is mighty rough in spots, and it's growin' dark."

Surely he could relax his self-restraint when it meant her comfort and safety, he thought to himself. For the first time since he had known her, his strong young hand closed over hers and held it fast. It was an epoch in his wild and lonely life; the shadowy hills, the sudden burst of stars overhead, the touch of the sweet little hand. They could not go fast, for Rajah lagged more and more. Every fear had left her, and she began speaking of their arrival at the ranch and of her father's accident.

"Better not to talk, perhaps," he said softly, and they continued in silence.

The crest of the bluff proved an admirable hiding place. It was thickly sprinkled with scrub pines and junipers, interspersed with patches of grass; but Rajah was too tired to eat. When the saddle was removed, he fell to the ground and began rolling and groaning in a perfect ecstacy of relief. The night had grown rather sharp, but of course it was out of the question to kindle a fire. Len wrapped his short buckskin coat about Naya and, feeling for a level spot, spread the saddle blanket for her.

"It's a pretty tough bed," he said, "but the pines is as old as the hills themselves, so Mother Earth 'll have to be your mattress."

"You think I take all?" asked Naya indignantly.

"I should say not," he answered promptly. "Do you think I'd allow such a horrible thing? I'm goin' to eat just half of this Dutch oven bread. It's only a week old, and I adore crumbs. And here's venison in delicate little slices as big as this bluff."

If the Fountain of Happiness had suddenly

gushed from the sandstone cliff and touched them with its magic spray, their mood could not have changed more completely. They sat Turk fashion on the saddle blanket, the stale and crumbled food between them, and gaily scanned each other's faces in the dim starshine.

"Why, grandmother, what a so big mouth you have," she said, as he caught up a handful of crumbs and, hungry boy fashion, made way with them in a jiffy.

"The better to eat you with," he rumbled ominously.

"Oh, I did say the Red Riding-Hood to baby Carver—Hannah did say it to me, you know—and I made the growl so real that he did cry, and I had to give him three lumps of brown sugar for a hush. What a so lovely funny picnic! Oh, Len, look!"

A pair of shining eyes gleamed in the darkness.

"Just a bob cat," he said, waving his hat at the beast. "They won't bother us. Come now, little picnicker, it's bed time."

In spite of her remonstrance he folded the blanket around her and arranged the saddle for a pillow.

"I'll sleep a little too, right here at your feet. There's no danger. Rajah's eatin' now, and in a few hours we must go on."

"The stars!" Naya whispered. "They were like that the night I came from the Great Spirit. Beautiful mother did say they laughed and danced on the dark, dark river."

"Of course they did, they were so glad," he said simply, "for another little star had come to laugh and dance with 'em and make people happy."

He lay on his back, looking up at the lovely sky.

"Do I—make you happy?" she asked after a little pause.

The faltering shy voice was so unlike her that his eyes turned in her direction, but only the faint outline of her face was visible against the dark saddle. He fought a moment to gain self-control.

"Yes," he said slowly, his voice shaking a little, "you make me happy, and, what's more, you make me want to be good. It's a wonderful thing—to make other people want to be good."

"Thank you, Lennie," she said softly. "It is the most beautiful thing one has said to me."

Then they slept; but despite his need of sleep, Len's restlessness soon awakened him, and he quietly rose to look about. Silence everywhere! There was a flare of silver in the east where the moon was slowly rising. Even as he stood, its bright rim crested a nearby bluff, catching its wind-bent pines in vivid and fantastic relief. Rajah, who was eagerly cropping the grass, lifted his head patiently as if to say, "Already?" However, it seemed that the kind but energetic young master only wanted to rub his stiff knees and pat him a little. "We must get her out of this, old fellow," he whispered. Then he took out his great open-faced watch and lighted a match, carefully shielding it with his hand. "Ten past eleven. Another hour."

Naya slept profoundly. He knelt and with a gentle hand pulled the blanket closer about her shoulders, and then sat leaning against a tree close by, his hands clasped about his knees. No, he wouldn't go to sleep again. He felt sufficiently rested and wouldn't risk oversleeping. If

it wasn't for that blasted moon! One could see all over creation.

He gave a start. Had he been dozing? There was a southwesterly breeze—the direction of the only access to the bluff, and it seemed to him he heard voices. He had been dreaming probably, but he arose to make another survey. He had gone but a little way when he stopped, almost paralyzed with consternation. There, squatting around a fire which they had just kindled, were six or eight Indians. Len gazed at them fixedly. Had they discovered his hiding place, and were they coolly waiting their own time before making an attack, realizing that they blocked his only way of escape? Or was it a chance camp? They were several hundred yards distant, and he could not be sure. Instinctively his hand sought the revolver at his belt. If it was a fight they were after, at least they would not forget him. Quick! There was surely some way of out-tricking them.

His boyish face set quickly in an expression of cool and invincible determination. He must decide on a plan before awakening Naya. Try to steal past the camp, trusting that the dazzle

of the fire would conceal them? No! No! The moonlit night and their keen Indian senses. There was surely some way to get down that cliff. They *must*. His whole plan became suddenly sketched on his brain as with fire. What if Rajah discovered the presence of the other horses and whinnied? Would the wind save them? He tied him to a tree with the bridle reins and, seizing the lariat, ran to the cliff. He peered over the edge, now here, now there, and finally chose what seemed to be its shallowest point, and knotted one end of the rope to an overhanging tree. It didn't reach! The blanket!

"Naya," he said, bending over her.

"Has the morning come?" she murmured drowsily and sat up, bewildered by her short heavy sleep and the abrupt awakening.

"No," he said, "but we are goin' on to the Springs. I want the blanket. Don't speak loud."

He slipped it from under her and began tearing it in strips.

"What do you, Len?" she asked in astonishment.

He saw that she was fully awake.

"The Indians are near. We must swing over

the bluff and run. The lariat ain't long enough."

She followed him in silence, but she was so excited that he could hear her short, intense breathing.

"Len, I never have," she said. "It is so far and so black."

She was kneeling on the brink of the cliff, peering far down at the great shadowy boulders at its base. Len had finished his splicing and was ready.

"You must," he said a little sternly. "Look, your hands like this. I'll go first. Wait until I'm at the bottom. There is no danger. I could catch you."

He took a firm hold and dropped over the bluff's edge while she leaned and watched, her heart beating painfully.

"Thou silly rabbit heart, thou must, thou must," she said to herself scornfully, in Blackfoot.

He was waving his hat from the bottom. She caught the rope as he had shown her, and in another moment the earth slipped from under her feet and she was swaying in mid-air and slowly slipping downward. She felt as if her

arms were being torn from their sockets, but shutting her eyes, she clung with all her might. Then Len's hands were at her waist and he was running down the slope holding her fast in his arms.

"Dear—brave," he murmured, "don't cry. We're all right. They don't know."

The head of a shadowy draw was a little way beyond, whence it glanced eastward like a black streak among the pale hills. When safe within its protecting gloom, he set her down, panting, for he found her a load, notwithstanding his great proportions and the iron muscles of twenty-one. Holding fast to each other's hands, they ran down the draw for a quarter of a mile, then around a great butte and straight south toward the Springs. The country they traversed was broken and barren save for the straggling pines and junipers and the fringe of brush that bordered the occasional stream, but in the moon's splendor it became invested with a wild, poetic fantasy that contrasted vividly with its dreariness when seen by the crude light of day. Gigantic masses of rock, steeped in silvery light and their own somber shadows, crowned the pal-

lid slopes like the ruined magnificence of an ancient city, long since fallen and forgotten. A row of dead cottonwoods stood stark and bare by a dry creek bed, their withered arms outstretched as if inviting them to join their spectral ranks. The effect was so realistic that Naya called Len's attention to it.

"Yes," he said, "but they needn't be beckonin' to us."

He had begun to breathe more easily, but, poor child, what a jaunt, what a terrifying experience—the cliff—the thought of possible shooting were they discovered, the bloodshed—the recapture! How tired she must be!

"Now I'm goin' to carry you a spell."

He caught her up and strode on rapidly. She was growing very tired and made no remonstrance, but lay quiet with her cheek against his shoulder. He restrained himself like a hero, keeping his eyes always on the dry creek bed he was following; but the thoughts flamed. During the long, long separation, when the loneliness and longing were worst, he would remember just this—the little arm clinging about his neck—the locks of soft hair blowing in his face.

He must be careful. The strain, the sleeplessness of the past week, something, had upset him. He must save and cherish all—all until that beautiful time when there would be no more loneliness, no more separation. Then the proud spirit, so sure of its own worth, its own strength, bowed its head before the remembrance of something Dougal had said one day.

"Humility is the grace." What if she loved some one in England; what if she saw in him only an ignorant, common cow-puncher, whose chief accomplishment was roping steers and busting bronchos? What if she even laughed at him? Something deep and sensitive in Len's heart cried out in pain, then there was a flare as of sheet lightning. No! Love such as he had to offer her was more than fine clothes and fine manners; she would be caught in its mighty current and swept on and on—

He suddenly became conscious that Naya was looking at him with intent eyes.

"What is it?" he asked, looking down.

"Please, Len, I—I will walk," she said shyly, and he placed her on the ground without a word.

"Only a few more miles," he said after a long

silence. "We'll just rest a spell in the shadow of this butte. Them little moccasins is pretty thin, and your feet must be tried. I have some whisky. Shall I rub them?"

He knew how they must ache after the miles of brush and rock, and his manner unconsciously enveloped her in the folds of a love so infinite and so gentle that she trembled.

"No—I thank you," she returned, and he said no more about it.

He sat a little apart from her, his broad-brimmed hat pushed back from his brow, his eyes scanning the surrounding buttes and bits of plain. Naya's hand plucked restlessly at a little sagebrush. Finally she leaned forward.

"Lennie," she said.

He turned with a start.

"Soon we will be with Dougal and then at the ranch with the many. I just wanted to say—I mean I wish it possible to say—the thanks for all. I think to it more and more. There is no forgetting."

"There is no forgettin' for me either," he said without looking at her, "and you have nothin' to thank me for; but I must thank God all my life

for lettin' me do even this little for you." He rose abruptly. "Are you rested? We'll keep in the shadow of this butte and then make for that black cañon over there."

She assented, and the silent journey continued. At dawn they sighted the Springs and a thread of smoke curling upward from some trees. Dougal was bending over the camp fire and did not see them until they were almost upon him.

"Bless me, it's tha bairnie," he said, as the weary child came slowly through the trees. "Hoo are ye, lad? This does my auld eyes more gude than a glimpse o' tha Hielands. Wi' out horses. Ye maun be weary. Shall we bide a bit? I've been here these three days an' a sittin' on peens an' needles, not darin' to stir and yet knowin' that ye had need o' me an' tha beasts somewhere. Ye'll just have a bite and then tell me all aboot it."

Naya sat down by the fire and held her hands to the blaze. The cheery voice and kind face were so familiar and yet so unfamiliar. It was like a dream. Some way life was not the same as yesterday.

"It broke me all up to leave old Rajah," Len

was saying, as he helped Dougal with the breakfast.

Naya looked at him with something of bewilderment in her sweet dark eyes, then she turned away. She would stay only long enough to drink some coffee, saying the ride would rest her, and in a quarter of an hour they started.

That night was spent in the shack of a lonely ranchman, where everything was done for her that crude but generous hospitality could devise, and the following evening they arrived home.

Naya slipped from Pehta's back and ran toward the house. She opened the door softly and looked in. William lay on a couch by the river window, his injured foot on a pillow. A book was in his hand, but he had closed it and was gazing out on the muddy, swirling waters of the Powder, his brow drawn as in pain. He heard a slight noise and turned. Then he gave a glad cry, and in another moment they were laughing and crying in each other's arms.

CHAPTER XV

Here is a promise of summers to be.
WM. ERNEST HENLEY—*Rhymes and Rhythms.*

It had grown very hot, and although only the last week of June, the flowers were dying and the shriveled stalks of the soap plant rattled huskily in the scorching wind. Out on the plain the scarlet mallow and lilies drooped and withered, while the rattlesnakes crept and coiled among them in sluggish content.

Old Tom hung over his garden like a mother over a sick child. He was *the* pioneer, *the* old timer whose advent to the Powder River country was antediluvian, and whose opinion on matters of climate was absolutely oracular.

"I come to these here parts when the Bighorns was jest a sproutin'," he said to Arthur, who was helping him in the garden, "and I'll be everlastingly kerfloppered if I ever see such weather as this here."

The old man leaned on his hoe and mopped his face with his great bandana.

"The lettuce is lookin' purty turrible bad," he continued presently, as he bent over the yellowing leaves, "but I reckon it don't much matter. When did you say the folks is a goin'?"

"Day after to-morrow," answered Arthur, hoeing so savagely that the air was full, not only of dirt and weeds, but of turnip tops as well. She hated turnips, and he felt like slashing them all into slivers.

"Day arter to-morry!" sighed Old Tom. "These here diggin's 'ull be purty tame without the leetle gal a orderin' us around and spoilin' us all in a minute. That there long-haired dog o' hern was a chasin' my young pullets one day, and I jest let fly a handful o' clods at the varlet. She seen me from the tree yender, and she was madder'n a hatter. 'Tom!' she sez, a runnin' to'ard me, 'If you do that again, I'll kill you! I will, you horrid old man!' " Old Tom chuckled softly. "In ten minutes she was out thar with a handful o' fried cakes and a cup o' root beer and a coaxin' and a pettin' me like a kitten. Thar's somethin' awful queer and fetchin' about 'er fer all her tantrum ways. And now she'll be hittin' fer the Old Country! Hum! Hum! That

'sam singin' cuss in the Bible is purty kerrect when he rants about the trials and tribulations o' life."

Arthur could not help smiling a little, although he was fearfully "down in the mouth," as he would have expressed it. He had always planned that some day *he* would show her the Westmorland hills (he did not call them mountains since he had come to America), the cave down by the sea, the little trout pond, the slope where the spring daffodils were thickest; and now she was going to dear little Clifdale without him, and he was to stay here in this barren, horrible place and hoe the beastly garden, and ride after the beastly cattle, and roast to death in this beastly heat. It was homesickness of the worst type. A girl would have wept and wailed herself into a more comfortable mood, but being a great boy, tears had been banished from his repertory, so his longing for England and his sorrow over Naya's departure gnawed and raged until life took on a very tragic aspect, indeed

"Ar-rthur!"

There was Dougal leaning on the fence. The boy dropped his hoe and hastened toward him

in relief, for a great sympathy had sprung up between him and the Scotch foreman.

"I'm off to tha foothills ranch for a week or so, an' I've just said my goodie-by to tha bairnie. You an' Len weel take tha fouks tae toon."

His eyes looked suspicious, Arthur thought, but the manner was as cheery as ever.

"Hoot on ye, mannie, didna be cast doon," he continued, noting the boy's woe-be-gone countenance, "Uncle Weelum 'll be back in a few months an' tha lass too, some day. I've been a talkin' matters ower wi' him all tha mornin', an' ye're to go on the range wi' Len this summer an' fall. Ye'll be in fine speerited company."

They were walking toward the stables now, and at these words Arthur's expression became less doleful.

"With Len? Jiminy, that's great! He's a dandy, all right."

"Yes, Len's shure a dandy," answered the big Scotchman, "if that means somethin' reech an' sterlin' under the wildness o' one an' twenty, but he's been pretty steady these last twelve months, an' wark! Gudeness! He's terrifyin'. He wud hae started for the range tha very next

day after we came frae tha north wi' tha bairnie, only yir uncle wud nae let him. Poor lad! He looked as if he had nae slept for a fortnight."

"And then he knows such a lot—not stuff like I used to chuck at school in England—but about things that are all around us. Yesterday he was telling me about the rattlesnakes. If anything scares the young ones, you know, why the mother just gulps them down as if they were her breakfast—just think, the whole mess of nasty little wriggling things, and when the danger is over, why, she just coughs them up again, and there you are."

"Shure, he's observin', is the lad," said the Scotchman, smiling at the other's enthusiasm, "an' wha's more, his intelligence is awakin' an' a growin' in a way that's surprisin'. Tha ither nicht I happened to tha bunk house an' he sat on his bed a' tellin' the boys all aboot bees—honey bees. Mrs. Hartwell had some, and he had observed 'em. He made it that interestin' that it was like a fairy tale, an' tha boys were a huddlin' aroond him like a lot o' bairns. Weel, goodieby, lad. Take care o' yirsel' I'll see ye an' Len on tha lower range next week."

Arthur watched him out of sight and then went back to Old Tom and his hoe. Dougal always made things seem worth while, somehow. He felt decidedly less hopeless and began to dig ground with energy. He'd "wark" and be "terrifyin'" too, and in a year or two he'd have money enough to go to Clifdale on a visit, just to see her and the folks; but not to stay, you bet. Dear old Len! What fun they'd have!

For Naya was really going to England. There had been a struggle, a struggle William did not like to think about, and now that she had yielded, she went about the house with a still, sad look that made his heart ache. At first she had pleaded softly and confidently, feeling sure that she could overcome the grave English father, as she had done so many, many times before; but he had remained firm, and then and there had been tears, bitter tears, bitter, passionate tears of pleading, and anger and denunciation of England, and everything pertaining thereto, ending in a mood of quiet steel-like obstinacy.

"I go not," she had announced with an air of

absolute finality. "England is little and stiff and horrid. I stay in the beautiful Wyoming."

After this defiance William made no further efforts at persuading her, but limped silently about the house and porch on the crutch the doctor had provided for him, his face and manner bearing eloquent testimony of the pain she had given him. When the second night came, she could hold out no longer. She crept into his room in her long white nightdress and, kneeling by the bed, caught his hand passionately.

"You shall not ever look to me so again. You shall not! You shall not! As if I was not longer your child. Say I am your child. Say it! I will go, father, only say it!" There was both terror and command in the sobbing voice. He had seemed to look at her across a measureless gulf of surprise and pain and indecision, as if he wondered if she were his child after all.

Yes, it had been a painful struggle. After Dougal's "Goodie-by," she stood looking out on the bluffs across the river, and William lay on the couch, trying not to think about his unhappy triumph of the night before. They could easily get ready in two days, and he thought it better to

have it over with as soon as possible. Hannah was in Naya's room now, selecting and packing the child's things. It was a relief to have her here again; she was so quiet and practical and capable in every way, and it had been an excellent decision,—that of taking her. Poor broken, lonely life, how cruel to have taken Naya from her; and then, besides, the child was deeply attached to her, and it made the going less hard. She passed through the sitting room and the happy energy in her step and voice proclaimed that at least one person on the ranch was not moping over the sudden turn of events. She would facilitate matters in the traveling, too.

William glanced up at Naya and thought it better not to disturb her. Dear sad little thing, she had never even been on a train. Would she be interested, or would she be merely repelled and mourn afresh for the beauties she was leaving? It seemed a harsh thing to do, to tear her from the life she adored, a life which would give her such enduring content. For it would be enduring if he kept her from the fever and unrest of that *other* life. He stirred restlessly. It was the old question again. After all, the trouble

with the Indians had had little to do with this sudden plan; it had merely hastened a step that was inevitable. He must show her the world of affairs and people and art, and *then* if she chose this life, as he had, he would at least have done his duty as a father. But she would never come back. Alas! The very intelligence, so quick, so fanciful, that he adored in her, would seize on some task out there in the world and, in the delight of her unfolding faculties, in the revelation of art or love or something or other, she would be gradually weaned from her wild ways, gradually immeshed in the happiness or sorrow of a new life. Then he would be all alone! Well, parents shouldn't expect their children to be just like them, to live exactly as they would have them. A life belongs to itself and should follow its own inner counseling.

It was extremely awkward for him, this going away just now. There were cattle thieves in the country, and he ought to be out on the range this minute; but he was leaving the business in mighty good hands. He trusted Dougal as himself, and then there was Len—that magnificent boy! He must do something for him sometime.

Of course it was impossible to think of paying him for what he did for Naya a week ago, he was such a proud young devil,—the mere doing was sufficient payment for such a nature, but perhaps by and by, when he returned for the beef round-up, he would form a company—Dougal, Arthur and Len. Yes, it would be a good thing, for he would have to be away most of the time now and—

"Father," said Naya suddenly.

"Come here, darling. What is it?"

She left the window and walked slowly toward the couch. Then she sank to a stool by his side and leaned her head against him.

"I—I wish to take Pehta anyway," she said hesitatingly. "I suppose it is not possible to take all the little wild things. I wish to much, but you think there are too many—yes?"

William was deeply touched by the pathetic plea, but he could not help smiling at the sudden vision of a Pullman sleeper overrun with horned toads and racoons and rabbits, and of affrighted and indignant female passengers with uplifted skirts and voices, standing terror-bound on their seats.

"Not Pigeon?" he asked in astonishment.

He could not see her face, but he thought she trembled ever so little.

"Pehta is most beautiful," she said faintly, "and I have taught him the little tricks."

There was a rap on the dining room door, and in response to William's cordial "Come in," it opened, and Len stood on the threshold.

"I was just goin' after a bunch of horses over in the buttes across the river, and I thought maybe Naya would like the ride."

In spite of the roughness of his dress, there was a certain young and fine distinction in the cow-puncher's presence, and William thought he had rarely seen anything so vividly charmful as the clean-shaven bronze of his face and the warm hazel of his straightforward eye. There was something curiously expressive about his countenance, something both reminiscent and prophetic. At one moment one saw a little boy of five, supplementing his questions with the clear brown gaze of childhood, and the next, there came a vision of Len at sixty, his fine face graven deep with the lines of life and thought.

He was ready for the ride. Sombrero and

quirt were in his hand, and as he entered with the careless, picturesque grace so characteristic of him, there was a creak of leathern "shaps" and a jingle of steel spurs that were like a battle cry to Naya. She involuntarily clutched her father's arm, and William looked curiously at the flushed, eager face she turned toward the handsome young cow-puncher. Evidently she forgot all about England, for the next instant she had sprung to her feet with the rough but musical little Indian cry which her dogs and ponies doubtless heard in their dreams, and went dancing about the room in a perfect gale of delight. The two men laughed, then stopped abruptly, each assailed by his own sad thoughts. Their eyes met. The gaze of the older man was searching and a little stern, but the younger returned it without flinching. "You know I won't speak," the brown eyes said proudly. "You know I trust you," the gray ones answered, softening.

"Go, darling, if you wish," William said to Naya, "but why not wait until after dinner? It is almost noon now."

"See Yup will give me the little sandwiches.

She looked down upon the home she was to leave so soon.

THE MET
CLEVELAND

We adore the picnic, do we not, Len?" And she danced toward the door all impatience to be gone.

It was their first ride together, in fact the first time they had been alone since the night of their escape from the Indians. Few people are capable of realizing an impending separation from some beloved person or thing, but despite his courageous and hopeful spirit, Len was already living with sharp and miserable intensity the parting that would be over ere the setting of three suns, and the years of loneliness that must follow. He was determined not to mar her ride —probably the last—with his unhappiness, but from occasional cheerful remarks he gradually lapsed into the silence that of late had become habitual with him. They had splashed across the river and were climbing the bluffs when she stopped her horse and turned to look. The rush of gayety had subsided, and she was now as silent as he. He reined Comet a little to the rear and sat watching her while, with one hand shading her eyes, she looked down upon the home she was to leave so soon.

It lay beneath them like a patchwork quilt

mellowed by time and sun to shades of softest brown and gray and green. There it was, the old log house on the winding river, and the cottonwood grove and the corrals, and the cornfield. The day was hot and still, and they neither moved nor spoke. Len thought he had never seen her look so Indian—so in harmony with her surroundings.

As if realizing the deprivations of the future, she had adorned herself in the barbaric splendor which, to the red race of the wilderness, is as precious as breath itself. Gradually, through Hannah's tactful endeavors, she had been persuaded to more civilized attire, but this morning there was no sign of that good woman's influence. Her moccasins and tunic of doeskin were richly embroidered with beads and feathers, and a cluster of white plumage drooped over the purple-black hair, now glinting with the fires of the noonday sun. She sat immovable—a statue, strangely significant and strangely fitting; an Indian maiden mourning over the lost realms of her people.

The glow in Len's eyes deepened and deep-

ened. Oh, to touch, to touch—that is the never ceasing cry of love.

Her hand dropped, and without a word she reined Pehta on up the hill. The young cow-puncher followed in a sudden spasm of misery and anger. Why tear the child from the very life she was born to? If he could only catch the wild little thing in his great strong arms and hold her forever and ever! Why, her own mother was but a year older when Dunsmuir married her. But *that* was different, he would say, after the fashion of all parents. Of course she was only a little girl, he knew that well enough—he wouldn't hasten matters for the world—but what a d—— shame to take her away from here, to fill her head full of the tricks and nonsense of that artificial thing called civilization—progress, and spoil this beautiful work of nature. Yet in spite of her child ways she had a comprehension far beyond her years. He recalled an evening a couple of months previous when her father had been reading aloud to them from "The Last of the Mohicans"—that final beautiful chapter wherein the Delaware maidens chant their exquisite and mournful eulogy

to the dead warrior Uncas and the lovely English Cora, for whom he has vainly given his life. Len had borrowed the book afterwards and had read and thought about the passage that had so touched Naya, until he knew it almost by heart.

"She called him 'the panther of his tribe;' and described him as one whose moccasin left no trail on the dews; whose bound was like the leap of the young fawn; whose eye was brighter than a star in the dark night; and whose voice, in battle, was loud as the thunder of Manitou. . . . They exhorted her to be of cheerful mind, and to fear nothing for her future welfare. . . . a warrior was at her side who was able to protect her against every danger. They promised that her path should be pleasant, and her burden light. They cautioned her against unavailing regrets for the friends of her youth, and the scenes where her fathers had dwelt; assuring her that the 'blessed hunting grounds of the Lenape' contained vales as pleasant, streams as pure and flowers as sweet as, 'the heaven of the pale faces.' . . . Then, in a wild burst of their chant, they sang with united voices the temper of the Mohican's mind. They pronounced him noble,

manly and generous; all that became a warrior, and all that a maid might love."

Here Naya had broken down, and putting her head on the table, sobbed as if her heart were breaking. "Stop, father, stop! I cannot bear it. He did love the beautiful lady and she did love him. I knew it the whole time, and they never said it to each other—never—never."

The tears started to Len's eyes. Never! Never! What a terrible word! And she understands what it is to love—she understands.

"Naya," he said, but the word died on his lips.

Naya turned.

"Did you speak?" she asked; then she saw his tears and her lips trembled. "What is it, Lennie?"

"I was only thinkin'," he said, recapturing himself with an effort, "how we'll all miss you when you're in the Old Country. My, what a string of mourners you'll have! I guess Old Tom'll head the procession. He says you threatened to kill him once, and he brags of it night and day as an honor you haven't bestowed on us other poor fellows."

They both laughed, but not very happily.

"Talkin' helps," thought Len, "an' I'll just keep a goin'."

"When you write to us you must take turns addressing the letters, or else there'll be a terrible row. 'Ze leetle Pico,' for instance. If his knife wasn't right handy he'd brain the lucky one with his stringbox, and See Yup! Gracious, don't slight him! There'd be nothin' left within a hundred miles except him and the butcher knife."

He was outwardly quite himself now, but the effort of self-repression had left him shaken and terrified at the force of his love. She did not respond to his nonsense, and evidently it had not been cheering, for, when he stole a look at her, the wistful sadness in her face smote his heart.

"Of course I will write," she said at length, and then timidly, "Will you make answer?"

"My, but you've got courage," he replied. "You ought to see my writin'. It's nothin' but orphan asylum, cow-puncher scratchin'."

"Goodie!" she said, softly beating her palm on the horn of the saddle with a little touch of her usual laughing spirits. "I write most awful too. Just awful, Len. I love the reading, but

what is the use to spend hours and hours on the crooked little marks. We should use the time to make each other happy. Just be simple and good and wait for the Great Spirit." Her face had grown thoughtful again. "Do you believe in the Christ?" she added abruptly.

He gasped a little. She was evidently after his religious opinions and, as they were not particularly well assorted, he was somewhat staggered. He was far from being irreligious, but the few missionaries whom it had been his misfortune to encounter on this distant border of civilization had been, for the most part, canting, dogmatical machines, who had only served to alienate him even farther from the creeds and formulas they upheld. But he knew and loved the story of the Man of Sorrows.

"Believe that he was a good man?" he asked in return.

"Not only that, but the son of the Great Spirit," she continued musingly, "that he could make the water red like the berry of the kinnikinic, and if the sea waves were as high as Cloud Peak, he could make them smooth again as the

prairie. Hannah believes it. It is the religion of the white man. Do you believe it, Len?"

How to answer the strange child? Len pondered.

"He was a mighty good man," he said finally, "and the rest of us fellows is meaner'n dirt beside him; and he was everlastingly smart, too, which some way people kind o' overlook; but the best part of it is, he makes a man feel that hopeful and self-respectin', as if we're just as good as him at bottom, and if we only would, could be just as brave and fine and everything. It sounds awful mixed up, but I think that's about it; we are and could be just as good as him if we only would."

"Yes, that is it," she assented, and then her voice sank to a note so deeply significant that Len's heart almost stopped beating. "You know last winter that man from Poison Spider Creek. I have told not even father, only you. He said the things to me that were not nice. You never have, Len, you never have, and I have been so much with you, and you are so brave and kind and everything—just as the Christ."

For one solemn moment his eyes sought hers,

then they slowly closed before the adoration he read there.

"Don't," he said almost inaudibly, "don't."

There was something so unutterably beautiful and childlike in her confession that he could not bear it. Comet leaped under the sudden touch of spur and dashed down the hill, leaving Pehta and his rider far in the rear. Len knew he must be alone in this new fight for self-mastery. At the end of a few minutes he rode back to her. His brown face was a little pale, but he smiled at her steadily and spoke as if nothing unusual had happened. It was the bravest act of his brave life.

"We'll have our lunch over in that draw. There's a little spring there and some rocks for shade. I don't see the horses, do you?"

She too was pale, and she scarcely looked at him. Arching her eyes with one hand, she carefully scrutinized the rolling brown hills, but her expression was that of one who has to do with deep, inner thoughts rather than any outward objects.

"I not see them," she said, and they spoke no more until they reached the spring.

It was all Len could do to steady himself. The sweet and unexpected revelation had so dazzled and confused him that a dozen times he was on the point of seizing those little brown hands and telling her all—all; but there was always the quick restraining remembrance of her youth, of his trust, and the plan he had imposed upon himself, the only plan that seemed to him honorable and fair. The effort for self-control was so great that unconsciously his manner became matter of fact to the point of coldness.

She sat just above him on one of the rocks that surrounded the spring. There was something distant and proud in her attitude, but the dark, slumbrous eyes were full of a shrinking pain that smote him afresh. This was different. Dear child! In the artlessness of her youth, she had revealed the hidden places of her heart, and thought that he did not care. Len leaned back against the hill and thought a moment before speaking.

"I'm goin' to tell you a little story," he began.

"But I am not longer a little child," she interrupted.

A great tenderness crept into his eyes.

"I know," he said in the gentlest voice she had ever heard, "but this is a mighty good story for real growed-ups, too, even if it is about a little boy. You see he was pretty bad in lots of ways; he hadn't been learnt very well, and he hadn't been much to school, and his father and mother was both dead, so he kind o' drifted into doin' things that he ought to have fought shy of. But he wasn't all bad. I guess the Almighty kept His eye on him after all, for one day he saw a flower garden, and his heart was awful touched. It was in the spring, and the roses was just buddin' and the lilies, white as that speck o' cloud up there, was just beginnin' to unfold, and there was little sweet smellin' violets that one couldn't see at all, but the boy knowed they was there, and they seemed to promise somethin' that only made his longin' worse.

"How the little boy did want that garden! He knowed he didn't deserve it, for, as I said before, he hadn't been very good, but he felt as if all his badness would just hit the trail forever if he could just have all them sweet spring buds for his very, very own. Then something spoke to him. It was an awful little voice and still it

was the most powerful thing the boy had ever heard. 'You must wait till it's summer,' it said, 'that'll give you time to work and be more deservin', and then the little buds'll all be lovely flowers, and perhaps you can have 'em.'

"The boy was awful sad; it was a long time till summer, and he saw he was goin' to be awful lonesome; but he was terrible brave—I'll say that for him—and he made up his mind to work like the very old Harry and try hard to be deservin', and then maybe the beautiful flower garden would be his after all. That's not the end of the story, but that's all I'm goin' to tell you now."

Len closed his eyes and lay still against the hillside. He had not the courage to look at her just then. There was a long silence; then she said tremulously,

"It is a beautiful story, Lennie, but—but perhaps the garden is not so lovely as the boy thinks."

"Yes," answered Len shortly, still keeping his eyes closed.

"Perhaps by the summer time," she half breathed, and then she rose. "I thought I saw some one riding on that far hill."

Len sprang to his feet to look, but the rider was out of sight. Her maidenly reserve and self-control filled his heart with pride. He had risked much in giving her even the vague comfort of the flower story, and notwithstanding her youth and impetuous temperament, she had understood and helped him in his duty.

CHAPTER XVI

Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep. *Proverbs,* vi:10.

They mounted and rode on through the hills whose great parched shoulders swam dizzily in the midday sun. But the enchanted fountain had again touched them with its spray, suffusing them with a soft happiness that was unmindful of everything except its own magic beauty. Once he caught the sparkle of her glance, and the joy and thrill of it made him think of his own little story. It was like spring trembling on the verge of summer. And once he smiled into her eyes with an expression so grave and restraining, and yet so beautiful in its love, that the memory of it stayed with Naya as long as she lived. Otherwise the succeeding hours were passed in the impersonal fashion that had always characterized their former rides. They ranged haphazard across the hills, scanning the horizon and examining every pocket and draw, but there was no sign of the straying horses. As they were

traversing a deep rocky gulch, Len dismounted to extract a pebble from Comet's foot.

"I found some mighty pretty moss agates right around here one day," he said, digging at the clogged hoof with his pocket knife. "They were clear as crystal and full of little black ferny things."

Naya, who sat on Pehta watching him, searched the ground with eager eyes. She was about to speak when—ping—a bullet just grazed Len's shoulder. The horses snorted and, wheeling, plunged up the steep hillside.

"Quick, Naya, over the hill," said Len, making a dash at Comet and landing in the saddle with one agile leap.

Two—three more bullets plowed the earth around them. The terrified horses, finding the ascent too steep, tore diagonally toward the crest of the hill. Len forced Comet to crowd in the rear, hoping to shield Naya, but his eyes never left a group of boulders on the far side of the gulch. His pistol was at the ready, but he was waiting. Something touched his side; it was like a drop of scalding water. He only sat

the straighter; then a sudden gleam of recognition shot across his face and he fired.

"I got you that time, you sneakin' whelp," he muttered.

The next instant they were racing down the other side of the hill.

"Why, who was it?" called Naya's voice above the clatter of hoofs.

Her eyes were wide more with astonishment than fright, for it had all happened so abruptly and in less than two minutes—the hot, languid day broken by a sudden wild tumult of pistol shots and plunging horses. She felt stunned. Len swayed a little and grasped the saddle horn.

"You are hurt!" she exclaimed, her voice vibrating with fear.

The horses were slackening their speed and looking about wonderingly, as if they too wanted to know something about it.

"Just a little queer in my head," he said. "I'll just get you home and come back."

He felt a moment's thankfulness that the wounded side was turned from her; then he concentrated his whole attention on keeping his brain steady. The hills danced and a deadly

faintness threatened him again and again, only to be driven back under the lash of his will. She looked at him in dread, at his pallor, at the strong hands clinging so weakly to the saddle horn, but she asked no more questions, for she saw he could not answer them. In fact, she had ceased to wonder about the strange occurrence. Her whole attention was given to one thought; if she could only get him home! They had gone perhaps a mile when, without a word or movement of warning, he fell headlong to the ground. Comet, terrified afresh by this new phenomenon, shied against Pehta and then rushed on, snorting and wild-eyed. In a moment Naya was bending over him.

"Oh! Oh!" she moaned, as she tried to move him.

He had fallen on his face, a limp, inert mass, and she did not see the blood until she had finally turned him on his back. Her head swam at the sight of the warm crimson stain, creeping and spreading over the soft flannel, but she set her teeth hard, and with quick hands tore the shirt from his side. There it was, the great horrible gash! Plainly her handkerchief was insufficient.

She remembered her white petticoat, and slipping it off, bound, after a fashion, the poor bleeding side. No, no, he was not dead! She felt again for his heart beat—faint yet distinct! But there was no water. Of course, that was the thing to make him open his eyes and speak again. She must fly to the ranch on Pehta and have them go for the doctor and bring the wagon—but where was he? She rose and looked about in a panic of dismay.

"Pehta! Pehta!" she cried, but the miles upon miles of burning hot hills gave back no answer.

Len stirred and, opening his eyes, gazed at her in dazed wonder. Then he remembered.

"Go home, instantly," he commanded, a strange fright ringing through his voice. "Perhaps I didn't get—" And then he fainted again.

Fortunately he had fallen on some soft turf in the shade of a bluff. His feet were still in the sun, but the kind, cooling shadow was slowly traveling downward.

Leave him indeed! It was miles to the ranch, but what *should* she do. He *must* have help! She fell upon her knees beside him in an agony

of grief and indecision. How hot his forehead! Surely there was water somewhere about. She took up his hat and ran around the bluff and down into some of the gullies that radiated from its base. Dry, all dry! Her heart was bursting, and the sobs came so fast that they almost suffocated her; but she must not give way. She must only *think, think* what to do. Then she gave a little cry of relief—here was water, only a string of brackish pools, but water just the same. She caught a hat full and hurried back. Cristecoom! There he was sitting up and talking and singing. The blood again!

"Lennie, Lennie, lie again," she pleaded, and forced him back upon the ground.

He smiled at the touch of the cool water, but all the time she was working over him he muttered or chattered shrilly of such a multitude of things and with such rapid incoherence that she caught only an occasional word or phrase. Now it was of the range and some of his comrades, now of the ranch, and sometimes he seemed to imagine himself a little boy again in the Massachusetts Orphan Asylum. "Wiggy, you d—— little fool," he said once affectionately, and then

huskily, "I'll fix you, you Poison Spider sneak."

It was useless to try to quiet him. He did not seem to even hear her.

"Little laughing star, how tired she must be. Not long—Dougal. Yes, the spring—then summer! What did he say, 'Never?' "

He thundered the last word and sat bolt upright with a look of terrible defiance on his flushed face.

"I will kill you if you say 'Never' again!"

Naya, with the strength born of terror, forced him down. He seemed to fall into a sort of stupor, and she sped for another hat full of water. When she returned he lay watching for her. There was something infinitely remote and sad in the clear hazel eyes.

"You are better," she said, a soft tenderness overspreading her strained white face.

"Yes," he answered, quietly.

"The horses went on home," she explained. "Soon they come for us. I could not leave you."

"I'm glad," he returned. "It's awful selfish maybe, but I'm glad you'll be here at the last—the very last."

His broken words frightened her.

"Lennie," she began, but he interrupted her gravely.

" 'Watchman, what of the night?' They're such fools most of them, but he was a first-rate youngster, and I've never forgot them words he talked about, 'Watchman, what of the night?' That's what I'm askin'—for the—night—is—comin'—fast."

The last words were almost inaudible, and the clear eyes slowly closed. Naya bent over him in helpless anguish.

"Naya's tears," he whispered, rallying a little. He lifted a feeble hand to his wet cheek. "How sweet—I may say it now. I love—love—love you."

The sad eyes opened again and their glow deepened—deepened, drawing Naya closer and closer until their lips touched and clung. Then he gently pressed her head to his breast. She lay there without moving, whispering little broken words of love and comfort until the hands in her hair grew quiet and cold. When she disengaged herself, she realized that Len was there no longer.

The sun still lingered on the hill tops, but the

shadows were gathering in the hollows and the birds were already chanting their melancholy evensong. The Indian child sat motionless by her dead, the great dark eyes staring and tragic.

A few hours later they found them and took them home.

"The man from Poison Spider Creek—not my people—not the Blackfeet," was what she told them.

Two months later the murderer was found. His death wound had left him only strength enough to slink into the Bad Lands, where he had died, a prey to the wolves and vultures. "Watchman, what of the night?" Was it the same for these two?

A rough bier covered with splendid robes was arranged in the sitting room, and there they laid him, the brave dead boy. The expression on his face was rapt, as of one who listens. Was it the song of Naya's waterfall that he heard? She knew.

Wiggy sat by his friend, weeping like a child. Naya crept in softly and laid her hand on his shoulder.

"I would put this."

"What is it?"

"Comet's bridle. Len so loved him."

Wiggy put his head on the edge of the bier and sobbed anew. With an exquisite tenderness Naya placed the bridle in the young cow-puncher's cold hand and then paused irresolute. No, she had had him quite alone those many hours, and now she must leave him to his friends.

Wiggy looked up and was filled with awe when he saw the changed, grief-stricken face. Where was the brilliant, laughing child of a month ago?

The following day they buried him under a cliff near the river.

"It faces to the south," said Naya, who chose the spot. "In the Moon of Winds, when all is bare and cold, it is like a golden carpet."

The following inscription was rudely chiseled on the face of the cliff:

"Watchman, what of the night?"
L. D. 188—.

Far below the river rolled noiselessly toward the distant sea, and on beyond were the bluffs and plains which would ring no more with his gay laugh and gayer song.

The night before William had injured his ankle again, and was unable to go, and most of Len's friends were out on the range or at one of the other ranches; but there were loving little Wiggy, and Spanish Pico, and Old Tom, and Arthur, besides the hoard of little Carvers and Hannah, clinging tightly to Naya's hand.

In the morning Arthur taught the boys a fragment of an Episcopal hymn he used to sing in the little Clifdale church. It seemed to him there ought to be some sort of religious ceremony.

"Now the day is over
Night is drawing nigh;
Shadows of the evening
Steal across the sky;

Jesus, give the weary
Calm and sweet repose;
With Thy tenderest blessing
May our eyelids close."

That was all he could remember, so they were to sing it twice, but one by one the voices choked and ceased, and only Old Tom's brave quaver was left for the last line.

When they were lowering the rough wooden box, Arthur said anxiously,

"There should be a little prayer. You, Mrs. Warren."

But Hannah, too moved to speak, only shook her head.

"Weegy," said Pico.

Wiggy looked blank for a moment, but Len was his friend, and without a word he covered his face with both hands.

"You ain't very well knowed out here on Powder River, O God, but we feel you are somethin' and somewheres. It's mighty tough, this here thing that's happened." Here he paused and gulped hard for an instant, and then continued bravely. "We'll miss him so terrible. You must have knowed that he was the best one in the gang and——" but he broke down completely.

There was a sudden wild sob. Naya had pulled away from Hannah and was running down the slope toward the river. She could endure it no longer. The trees received her and she was seen no more until dark.

"How terrible it has been for you, darling," said William, when she went to bid him good night.

"Yes," she replied, "Len is here not longer."

And that is all she ever said on the subject.

CHAPTER XVII

Life hath more awe than death.
BAILEY—*Festus.*

Farewell! A word that must be,
and hath been—
A sound which makes us linger;
—yet—farewell!
BYRON—*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage.*

The dawn glow was fading, and the clouds hovering dreamily about the mountain peaks suddenly streamed and flashed like golden banners. Broad belts of sunlight slanted across the plain, and the air was full of the stirrings and songs that betoken the birth of another day.

Naya sat on Pehta, watching. Two weeks had passed since Len's death, and this was the morning of their departure. They had already said good-by at the ranch. The speck of dust far in advance was the buckboard bearing those who were to accompany her on the long journey to England. She had told them she would catch them, and they had driven on and left her.

There, winding among the rolling hills, was The Road which she too must follow in a few minutes. Whither did it lead? So it was true, the book talk about great seas and great cities and strange people speaking in strange tongues. Faces, indistinct, yet significant, crowded about her in confusion. Did they await her in that new life? She sat motionless, stirred by mystic visions. She seemed to be waving an eternal farewell to some one who stood on the dim shore of another existence.

Suddenly all unbidden there came an overwhelming remembrance of herself as she had been a year ago, the day her father came from England, the day she laughed at the antics of the prairie dogs and heaped the house with flowers. A world yawned between her and that Naya. Oh, the rush of happiness and the tragic, bitter ending of it all! Was this the meaning of life—the thing she had read about? Was it just a confused mingling of joy and sorrow and then—the night?

She drifted farther and farther away on that spirit sea where strange voices sing in thrilling harmony of struggles and sorrows and eternal

love, and where a Divine Hand holds forth the Flaming Sword of Life. Life! The sense of its beauty and its terror suddenly swept her like a tempest! There was an exultant leap of her whole being, then it died away and, with streaming eyes, she gazed about in a passion of farewell. Beautiful mother, more beautiful than the dawn star when the sky is like wild roses—fold her close to your great peaceful heart, dear mountains, for Naya comes no more. And he who lies silent by the winding river; he whose gentle hand and brave spirit had led her to the portals of love and joy, only to leave her standing there alone. Alone!

"Good-by, Lennie," she whispered bravely, "Good-by."

Then she sought The Road and journeyed on.

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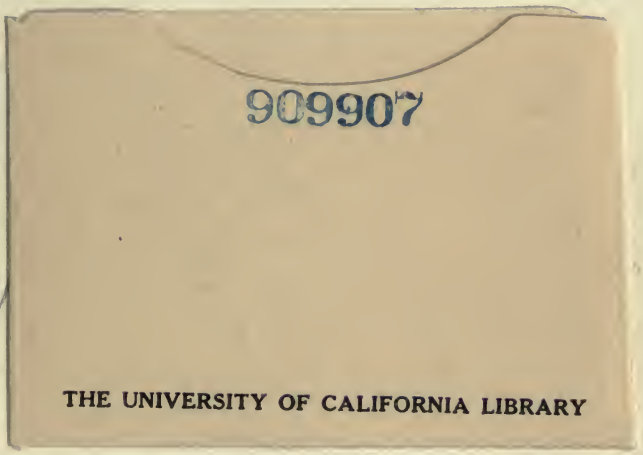
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